PS3™ PlayStation 3 | PSP® PlayStation Portable | PS VITA PlayStation®Vita

PlayStation®
Official Magazine

Issue 056 March 2012

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 56 (March 2012)

V-DAY! PS Vita Launch Guide

TROPHIES Platinum in less than 10 hours

STARHAWK
Warhawk's successor takes the battle to the stars

REVIEWED
Kingdoms of Amalur
SoulCalibur V
NFL Blitz
NeverDead

ZOMBIES AND CHEERLEADERS?
We ❤ Lollipop Chainsaw!

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INCLUDES 4 NEW ADDITIONAL CHARACTERS AND SKINS

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KOMPLETE EDITION

BEST FIGHTING GAME

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4 NEW CHARACTERS

THE BEST FIGHTER IS NOW KOMPLETE

15 KLASSIC SKINS

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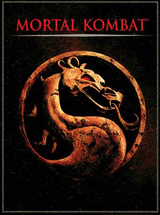
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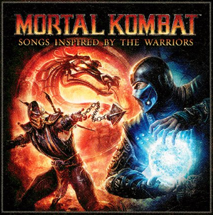
MORTAL KOMBAT DIGITAL MOVIE*


MORTAL KOMBAT
SONGS INSPIRED BY THE WARRIORS

MORTAL KOMBAT: SONGS INSPIRED BY THE WARRIORS [WITH BONUS TRACK]*

XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PlayStation 3 PlayStation Network NETHERREALM GAMES

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MARCH 2012

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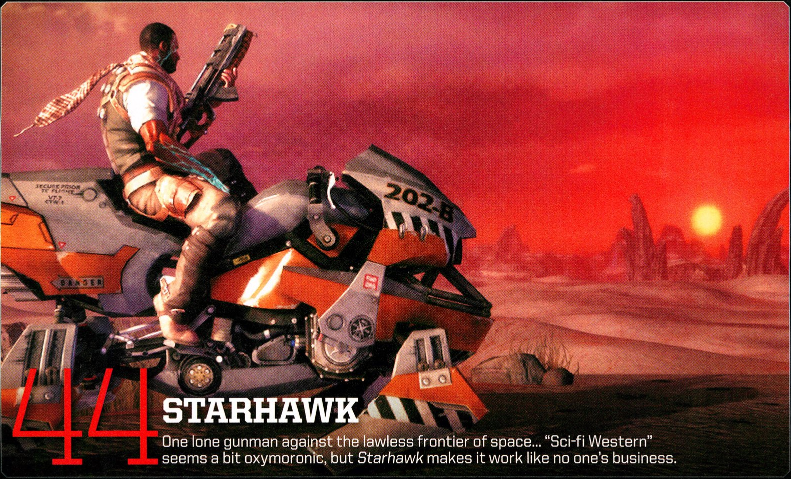

44 **STARHAWK**
One lone gunman against the lawless frontier of space... "Sci-fi Western" seems a bit oxymoronic, but *Starhawk* makes it work like no one's business.

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Featuring new characters (and missing some favorites), *SoulCalibur V* has arrived.

Viva la Vita

The best handheld gaming system ever created is about to arrive

I'm a skeptic at heart. It takes a while to earn my trust and respect. But after just a few short weeks with the PS Vita, I'm confident in proclaiming it the best handheld system ever made. Say what you will about the genius of past Nintendo portables, absolutely no handheld has ever offered the experience Vita offers. It's the first handheld that I've ever used that doesn't downsize the quality or pleasure of videogaming.

Yes, there are legitimate concerns about Vita's price, the price of its proprietary memory cards, and whether there's still a place for gaming-centric portable systems in a world of games-capable smartphones. The concerns have gained some credence by what various commentators have labeled a "lukewarm" Japanese launch (although 500,000 units sold in a matter of weeks doesn't seem all that bad to me).

But as the U.S. Vita launch approaches, I'm finding it easy to drown out any skeptical thoughts in my own head by simply playing more Vita. The OLED screen in particular is astonishingly vibrant and sharp and, unlike with past portables, my slowly aging eyes don't need to squint to make out important details. I'm also finding battery life to be less of a concern than I initially feared—it's at least as good as my iPhone 4S. And the games... There are just so *many* titles coming, and so many that satisfy what I seek—not as a casual gamer—but as a *gamer*.

So if you've been on the fence about whether or not the Vita's worth getting excited about, I encourage you to check out our PS Vita Launch Guide (starting on page 54) and then spend some hands-on time with the handheld yourself. I think you'll find, as I did, that it's awfully hard not to fall in love once you've played one.

R.g

Roger Burchill
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Art Director
twitter.com/ArtKenPTOM

We once asked Ken Bousquet what the No. 1 song on the charts was when he was born. He said it was the music of magic and mysticism. We haven't asked again.

Scott Butterworth
Associate Editor
twitter.com/ScottPTOM

The week Scott Butterworth was born, the top song in America was "Rock Me Amadeus." This may explain why he loves German and powdered wigs so much.

Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/RyanTaljonick

Though the No. 1 song when Ryan Taljonick was born was "Amanda," he has never heard it due to the fact that his parents are staunchly anti-Boston.

Anne Lewis
Editorial Intern
twitter.com/BDRAnneLewis

Anne Lewis feels like her life is based on the top song on the radio when she was born, and every day she wishes that song wasn't Roxette's "It Must Have Been Love."

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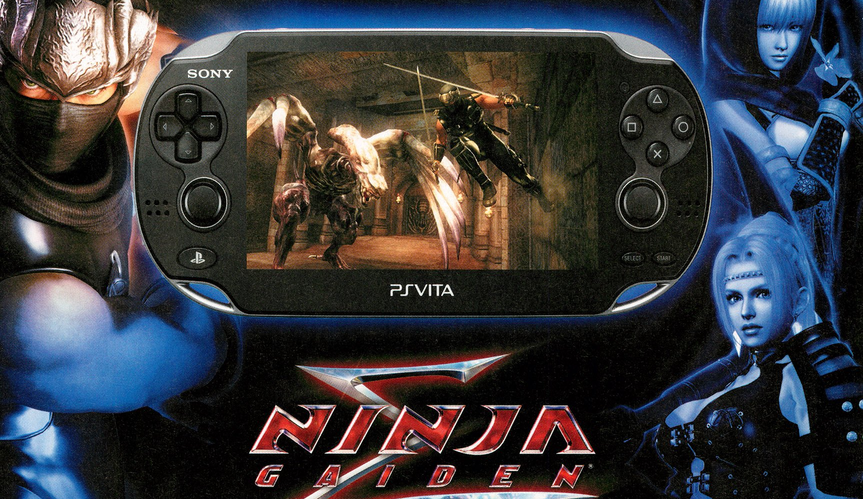
MASSIVE CARNAGE IN A PORTABLE PACKAGE.



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Inside Qore Episode 46

Fly Me to the Moon

Starhawk might be a sci-fi action game, but it plays like a frenzied rock-paper-scissors—in a good way! With so many vehicles and weapons, and the ability to build structures in the middle of battle, you'll have to stay sharp to avoid getting trumped. We visit LightBox to get the inside details from the game's developers. If you like your futuristic action on foot, step into *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier.* The game's developers get us ready for battle. What about bipedal vehicles? *Armored Core V* answers the call, and we get hands on with this mech warrior. And we visit the Tempest Freerunning Academy in L.A. to learn how to pull off our favorite games' parkour moves.

JESSE BLAZE SNIDER HOST OF QORE

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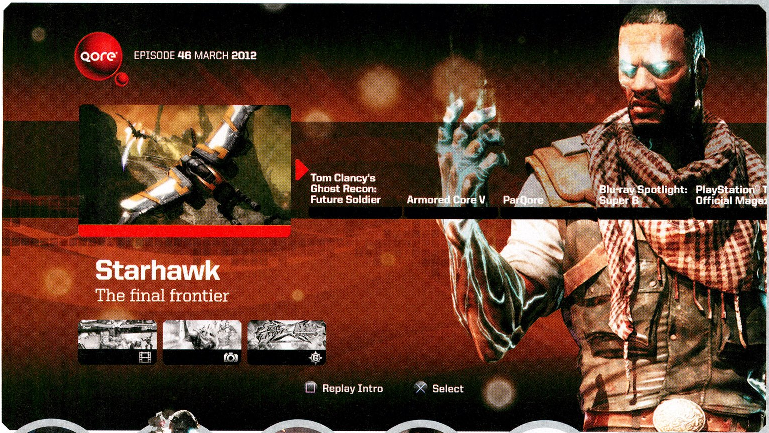
qore
EPISODE 46 MARCH 2012
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
Armored Core V
ParQore
Blu-ray Spotlight: Super 8
PlayStation® T Official Magaz
Starhawk
The final frontier
☐ Replay Intro
✕ Select

Starhawk
Birds of prey.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
Post-modern warfare.

Armored Core V
Put one foot in front of the other.

ParQore
I'll tumble for you.

Blu-ray Spotlight
The truth is out there in *Super 8.*

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Individual episodes can be purchased for $2.99 and a 13-episode subscription can be purchased for $24.99. Qore subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

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The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

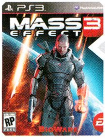
MONDAY | **TUESDAY** | **WEDNESDAY** | **THURSDAY** | **FRIDAY** | **SATURDAY** | **SUNDAY**

MAR 01

The Good Guys
President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps on this day in 1961.

03

And So It Began...
On this day in 1855, Congress approved $30,000 to test camels for military use.



06

In Effect
Time to kick some intergalactic butt with the release of *Mass Effect 3*.

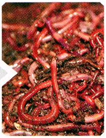
In stores:
Street Fighter X Tekken, MLB 12: The Show, MLB 2K12, Game of Thrones, Silent Hill HD Collection

07

Welcome Back!
True, it's not the first time *The Office's* Jenna Fischer has graced our pages, but we can't help our celebri-crush on the beautiful birthday girl.

08

Be Nasty Day
This has us feeling uncomfortable for so many reasons. We're sorry but there are too many ways to "be nasty" and we want no part of any of that.



10

Money to Burn
On March 10, 1862, the first United States paper money was issued. The denominations were $5, $10, and $20.

11

Turn that Frown Upside Down
On this date in history, Goths laid siege to Rome in the year 537. Now they just hang out in high schools.

12

Going the Extra Mile
Gandhi began his 200-mile march to protest the British salt tax on this date in 1930. We complain about walking 20 feet to the vending machine for a Snickers bar.

13

Double the Unrated Fun
Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle and *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* in one glorious Blu-ray pack is out today.

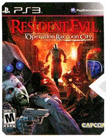
In stores:
Silent Hill: Downpour, Tales of Graces F

16

Good Doggie
Sergeant Stubby, World War I's most decorated war dog and the only canine to be promoted to Sergeant through combat, died on this day in 1926.

17

St. Patty's Day
Yet another thing kids can't truly enjoy. Happy St. Patrick's Day, fools! Time to get our disgusting, toxic-looking green drink on!



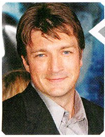
20

Umbrella Policy
Evil corporate stooges, underpaid civil servants, and zombies face off in *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City.*

In stores:
Ninja Gaiden 3, Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2, Top Gun: Hard Lock

24

Momma Mia
How I Met Your Mother star Alyson Hannigan celebrates her big day today and, without being Barney-ish, we want to wish her a very happy birthday.



27

Filling Up
Nathan Fillion, the actor who "should play every role ever," celebrates his 41st birthday today.

In stores:
Dragon's Dogma, Yakuza: Dead Souls, Silent Hill: Book of Memories (Vita)

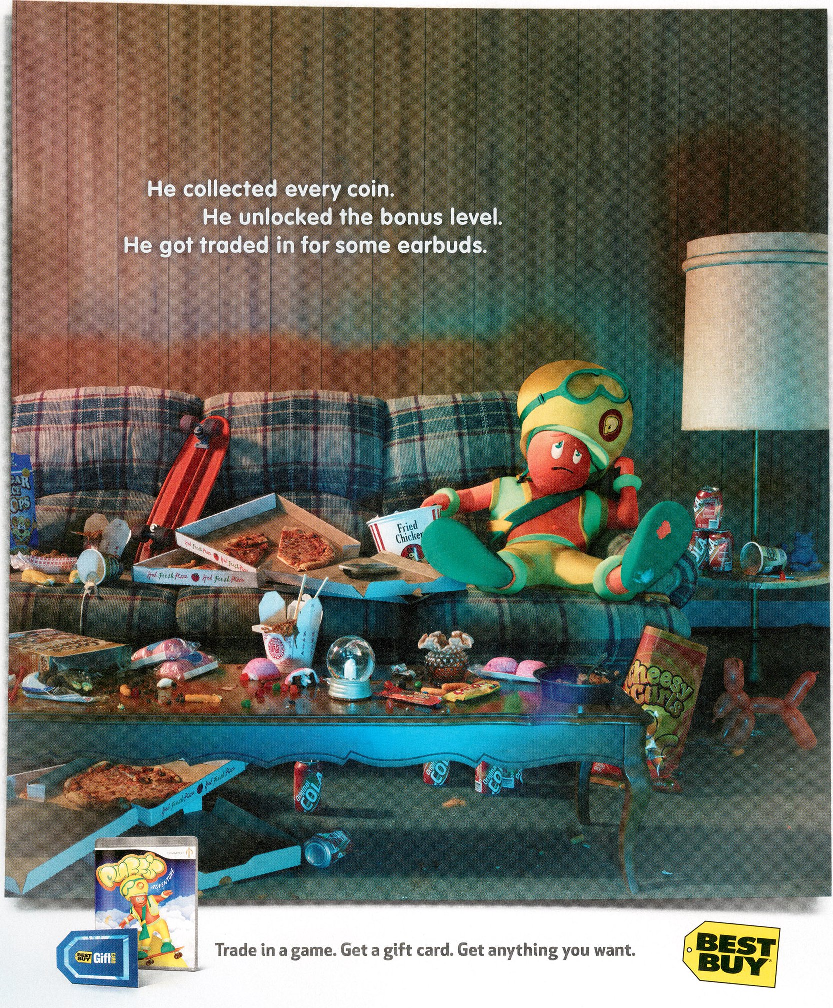
28

San Fran Founded
This day in 1776, Juan Bautista de Anza and 247 colonists built a military fort in the San Francisco Bay Area, founding what is now San Francisco.

31

Tater Day
Today we celebrate Solanum tuberosum by eating nothing but French fries, potato skins, and mashed potatoes. Carb up!

* Release dates are subject to change by the publishers.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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Games of Love

Get your significant other into gaming with our handy flow chart.
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Undead Heads

The Walking Dead devs spill their guts on the upcoming game.
⏩Page 18

Project Ogre

Hideo Kojima leaks images from his top secret open-world game.
⏩Page 20

Blame Canada

We could share our reaction to a South Park RPG, but we'd have to censor it.
⏩Page 21

The Great Debate

Should Sony reveal the PS4 this year? PTOM eds opine.
⏩Page 24

1

Guess what we heard...

Juicy rumors emerge on unconfirmed games

Normally we don't like to report on rumors since they're, well, rumors. As in things-we-don't-really-know-for-sure-but-probably-kind-of-do. Sometimes, though, those rumors are pretty substantial and have some credible backing. There are a lot of exciting games on the horizon that may or may not be in the works (but probably are), so we decided to gather up our favorite unconfirmed (but probably real) titles and break down everything (we think) we know about them.

Yeah, we know what you're thinking: "Multiplayer? **In God of War?** Madness!" Us too. How would it work?

God of War IV

Word on the street is our favorite god-killing badass, Kratos, is making his return in *God of War IV*. Speculation of the unconfirmed title began when developer Santa Monica Studio posted a pair of job listings for a new *God of War* game, seeking both a senior staff concept artist and a senior online programmer. Yes—an *online* programmer. Yeah, we know what you're thinking: "Multiplayer? In *God of War*? Madness!" Us too. How would it work? Would it be co-op or competitive? Perhaps both? We're not sure. The game's existence was later all but confirmed by a man named Timothy Williams, who listed it in his resume as an upcoming project for which he is doing orchestrations and music-related work. So, *God of War IV* seems inevitable, and will probably be awesome. Hungry for more details? Here's one last rumor: It's allegedly hitting retail shelves this September.

Medal of Honor 2

There's only one publisher that can steal some of Activision's *Call of Duty* glory, and that's Electronic Arts. EA's got two properties to compete with its adversary: *Battlefield* and *Medal of Honor*, the latter of which has a confirmed sequel in the works. Whether or not *Medal of Honor 2* can stack up against *Black Ops 2* (assuming both are 2012 releases) remains to be seen, but either way, the "war of shooters" is far from over.

Hitman: Profession

It's been six years since we've had the chance to crush the windpipes of assassination targets with some fiber strangulation wire. Six long years. Naturally, we're ecstatic for the upcoming *Hitman: Absolution*—but we're also intrigued to hear more about *Hitman: Profession*, a title recently trademarked by Square Enix. While we're always down with tagging hits as the deadly Agent 47, we hope the *Hitman* series doesn't start following in the annual-release footsteps of games like *Call of Duty* or *Assassin's Creed*.

Epic Mickey 2

Now here's a surprise—an official Disney newsletter (which was mistakenly posted online and quickly removed) indicated *Epic Mickey 2*, a sequel to a Nintendo Wii exclusive, is in development and will see a multi-platform release. PS3 included. The 2010 original was an open-ended platform game that employed a few RPG elements, including a morality system similar to that found in *inFamous*, while exploration yielded plenty of side quests and powerups. Furthermore, Mickey's magic paintbrush allowed players to draw or erase objects using paint and thinner, changing the world as they saw fit. Technically, *Epic Mickey 2* hasn't been confirmed for a PS3 release—but we wouldn't mind hanging out with Disney's famous mascot.

Diablo III

Perhaps the biggest shocker of them all: *Diablo III* may indeed be coming to PS3. When asked if he could confirm *Diablo III's* console development, Blizzard community manager Micah Whipple replied with a rather blunt "Yup," denoting that Josh Mosqueira (designer of the PC game *Company of Heroes*) is in charge of the *Diablo* console project. Blizzard has since stated that Whipple's response was intended solely as a confirmation that the possibility of developing a console version of *Diablo III* is being explored—not that such a version is actually in development. If the game *does* land on consoles, though, it will mark the first return of the fabled franchise to a PlayStation platform since the 1998 original.

TEAM DEATHMATCH
32/237

Call of Duty: Black Ops 2

Much to the surprise of absolutely nobody, the next *Call of Duty* is rumored to be *Black Ops 2*. Activision recently purchased a series of Internet domain names, including BlackOps2.com—and since *Modern Warfare 3* shattered previous *Call of Duty* sales records, it would be foolish to think even for a second that Activision would forgo releasing a new franchise entry in 2012. Now, the last few games have seesawed between developers Infinity Ward and Treyarch—and if this trend continues, that means it's Treyarch's turn. *BLOPS 2*? Likely.

The Big 10

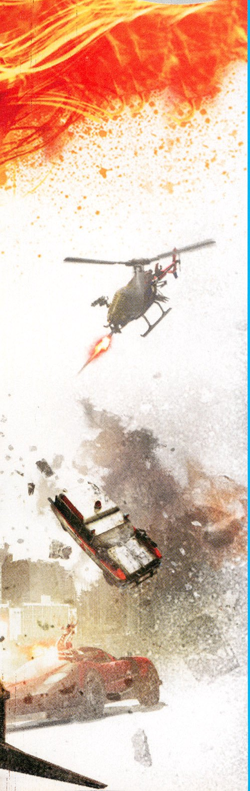
Stories everyone's talking about

> "But we have that side in us—we have that brutal, violent darkness, and it doesn't have to be a bad thing."
>
> —*David Jaffe, Eat Sleep Play*

2

Twisted by design

Twisted Metal's design guru David Jaffe offers a peek at his creative psyche—and his future plans



Your games are very dark, disturbing visions, but you appreciate all things Disney. How do you explain this dichotomy?
So to go to Disneyland and walk around that park—especially the one in California that was Walt Disney's baby—and to realize how hard it is to create, and how many obstacles both creatively and practically and monetarily and legally and haters and naysayers and your own self-doubt... And to actually be in that place where this guy by sheer force of will, with *Snow White* back in the day where he mortgaged his own house and everyone was saying there was no way a feature-length cartoon would work and he put everything on the line for it, and to be standing in sort of a physical representation of what that resulted in... I think if you're a creative individual who has struggled through the creative process it's impossible to feel anything other than inspiration and say, "Wow, okay, it doesn't matter how hard it gets. Persevere."

But the dichotomy question is... You know, I don't know. I don't get it. I'm certainly aware of it. Here's what I think: We have both sides in us, and I love both of them. I've been in one fight in my life and it was in the third grade and thank god I won and that kid never picked on me again and nobody else did either. But we have that side in us—we have that brutal, violent darkness, and it doesn't have to be a bad thing. It's a joy. It's a joy to be in that space and just kind of entertain. I think people are scared to open that door because they're afraid they're never going to be able to come back out. But for me, I love swimming in those waters.

But do you think there might be a lighthearted game inside of you trying to get out?
I don't know. I don't sit down and say I want to work on something that is lighthearted. I just kind of... I have a huge whiteboard and last spring I started filling it with ideas. What can we do next? What's the next game I want to work on? And except for three ideas that were the strongest eight months ago, all the other ideas have fallen off the board. The passion for those three was never a conscious choice, it's what the subconscious is saying to me. So far that leads me to dark places. I will tell you that two of the three are pretty f–king dark.

How much choice do you really have though? If you were to say, "I want to do something lighthearted" to Sony, would they go, "Uhhh, really?"
Well, they might and that's their prerogative. I'm grateful, and I can't tell you how much I owe to Sony for my career and my education in the industry. But at the same time, the only thing that could trump that is if I'm feeling I have to find a way to make a game based on...*My Little Pony*, and that is what my gut is saying I have to do. I'll try to convince them until the cows come home, but if Sony isn't the place to do that, then at the end of the day I have to follow that little pink pony wherever it leads me. That's gonna be the quote now and I know it!

But what's so cool about this industry right now is that there are so many options. Out of these three [potential] games, two of them I cannot make without Sony because they're really f–king big things. One of them—if I want to f–king teach my kids how to eat nothing but ramen and put their college fund at risk—I could pay for on my own and put out on a number of devices and have the freedom to do whatever I want. The sky and your imagination is the limit. I'll probably give myself through February to kind of figure things out and try to get rolling. Whether that's going out and getting money or whether that's getting Sony to say, "Yeah, let's do it Jaffe" or whether that's saying, "Kids, there are five flavors of ramen..." I don't know. I'll let you know.

I AM NOT A HERO
I AM A MURDERER
I WILL KILL TO SAVE ANOTHER

MATURE 17+ ™

M

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes

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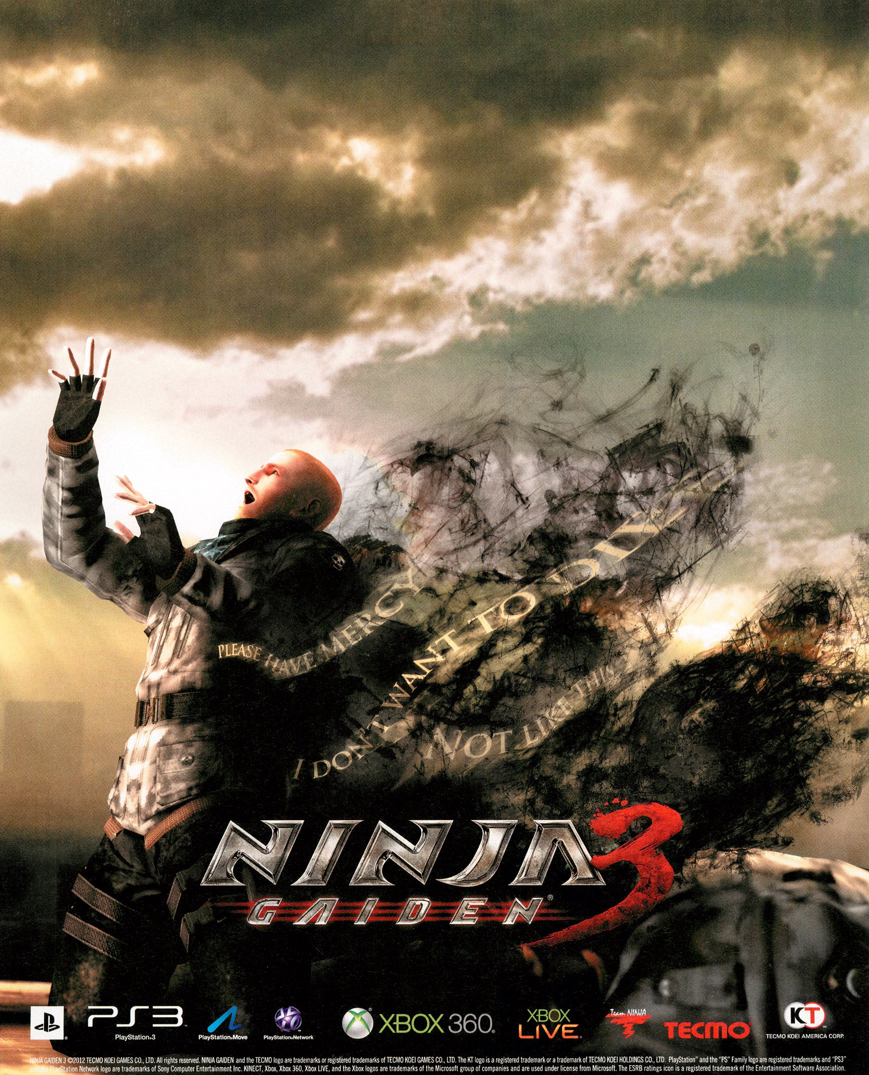
PLEASE HAVE MERCY
I DON'T WANT TO DIE
NOT LIKE THIS
NINJA GAIDEN 3
PS3
PlayStation 3
PlayStation Move
PlayStation Network
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE
Team NINJA
TECMO
KT
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3

Be mine, Valentine

A flow chart of success for a romantic day of co-op gaming

"Roses are red, violets are blue, let's co-op together, these games are for two." Want to share a passionate day of gaming with your significant other? Drop that sexy line, put on some Marvin Gaye, and fire up the PS3—we here at PTOM have created a foolproof flowchart to help achieve that goal. Whether your partner is a non-gaming lover or a lover of games, our elaborite list of co-op titles has you covered.

Does your partner know what a DualShock controller is?

no

LittleBigPlanet 2

The charm of *LittleBigPlanet 2* is that it can become any kind of game. Together, couples can build something special: a platforming level filled with floating hearts, a cutesy kart racer, or an allegorical simulation in which Sackboy must overcome the obstacles of relationships by avoiding dubious traps and other Sackboys.

You Don't Know Jack

YDKJ is full of mind-bending questions like: "How many Earths could you stuff into the volume of Uranus before it just couldn't take any more?" Winner gets bragging rights, loser does the dishes, and everyone giggles about "Uranus."

yes

Castle Crashers (PSN)

Ladies: There's no better way to convert too-tough macho men into game-loving man-children than a playthrough of *Castle Crashers*. Fight hordes of bad guys side by side and laugh at woodland creatures that crap themselves at the first sign of danger in this save-the-princess tale.

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7

Enjoy romantic roleplaying? Hit up *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7*. Seriously. Scoring points for Gryffindor is as easy as brewing up a Love Potion and working some magic (spells). Be sure to practice Occlumency, though. Snape's got a reputation as a party pooper.

Would your partner jump over a pit of mutated sea bass to save your life?

yes

Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light (PSN)

We love surprise trust falls, so we're pleased as punch we can do them in this game. As Lara, recall her grappling rope while Totec is tightrope walking across a spike-filled chasm. Just don't forget to yell "trust fall!"

Anything else
Seriously. Play *any* other game on this list.

no

Saints Row: The Third
Take a good, hard look at your partner. Either you've just found your soulmate, or your significant other is significantly *strange*. Steelport is your disgusting little oyster, a pleasure-filled playground of pure chaos. Where else can two people shoot whimpering mollusks at each other's faces?

yes

Is your partner at all interested in farts, phallus-shaped baseball bats, punching dudes in the junk, or parachuting out of a jet while dual-wielding pistols?

Resistance 3
There's only one thing more satisfying than saving all of mankind from an alien invasion: saving all of mankind with the help of your significant other. *Resistance 3* is one of PlayStation's top-tier shooters and is one of the few that offers a co-op run through its campaign.

Borderlands
Two words: gun porn. When it comes to firearm fantasies, *Borderlands* reigns supreme. Now you and your beloved can guffaw like maniacs as together you embark on guns-blazing missions while mowing down legions of bandits and tiny little mutant men.

no

Portal 2
The scariest thing about GLaDOS is not that "she" is a murderous machine, but that "she" is so good at turning two people against each other in *Portal 2*'s co-op campaign. "I think Orange is actively trying to sabotage your success. Let's keep this between us."

Trine 2 (PSN)
Much like the ideal companion, *Trine 2* has beauty and brains. Much like a real companion, it's also a complex puzzle at times that rewards failure with mental anguish. Tread carefully.

yes

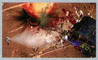
Is your partner exceptionally good at problem solving?

no

Does your partner smile with glee at the sight of blood or broken bones?

yes

Rayman Origins
Rayman Origins is sure to test the limits of any relationship; it's a sadistic 2D platformer at times. Like the emotional rollercoaster of love, *Origins* often seesaws between "this is fantastic!" and "ARGHHHH!"



Dead Nation (PSN)
Dead Nation is a gore-fest that pits the last of humanity against waves of zombies—a great way to find out how useful your partner would be a during a *real* zombie apocalypse. Sidekick supreme or human bait? Let the game decide.

Outland (PSN)
A fiendishly fun (and equally challenging) platformer, *Outland* is a game of circumstance and timing—just like a marriage proposal. Do the wrong thing at the wrong time and you're toast. Unlike real life, *Outland* allows for unlimited mulligans.

ModNation Racers
Is your lover a sucker for cheesy lines? Try loading up *ModNation Racers* and dropping the classic "you have the keys to my heart." Just try not to follow that up with a crushing win and a poorly timed "time to trade in for a newer model."

PixelJunk Monsters (PSN)
PixelJunk Monsters is a perfect introduction to the tower defense genre. It's also a perfect deterrent for procreation. Pretend the home base represents your life. Now watch in horror as cute little monsters invade and destroy it.

Mortal Kombat
Relationships can be stressful—so blow off some steam via *Mortal Kombat* for plenty of smack talk, punches to the groin (no real ones, please), and brutal executions. Nothing says "I love you" more than a Babality.

Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One
An engaging platformer with plenty of wacky weapons, *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One* is a great choice for a couples game night. Just be sure to stick the other duo with Dr. Nefarious—nobody likes that shoddy jerk.

no

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

4

Play dead

We pick Telltale Games designer Sean Vanaman's brain about The Walking Dead game

Will this adventure game be similar to past Telltale games?
The best way I can describe the game is "story-driven adventure horror." This is a game that's faithful to the world created by Robert Kirkman, so it's not just another zombie shooter where you have tons of ammo and the sound of gunfire attracting zombies is nothing to worry about. It's based on human drama and emotion that happens to be set against the backdrop of an undead apocalypse. You'll explore and try to survive within a 3D world, encountering potential allies, enemies, and of course, the undead.

***The Walking Dead* is about normal people being forced to choose between universally terrible options. Will players be forced to make similar decisions?**
Absolutely! That's a huge part of our game. An example situation is where two people need your help but only one can be saved. How do you choose who lives and who dies? On top of that, the choice you make will affect you as you move forward in the game. Some choices you'll make are dialog-driven, but they're not black and white choices.

Does the story branch based on players' decisions?
Yes. On the upper end of the scale, branching can be as big as a character being dead in one person's game but alive in another's. We want people to talk to each other and say, "Wasn't it cool when X happened?" and the other person says, "What? That didn't happen in my game!"

Is the game based more on the comic or the show?
The comic book is the heart of *The Walking Dead* universe that drives both the TV show and now our game, so it's where we've built our story from. If you're a fan of the show, the comic, or both, you'll instantly be able to relate to the game. If you haven't seen the show or read the comic, the game is actually a good place to start since some of the events of our game take place before the timeline seen in the show or comic.

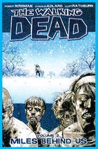
Can you tell us anything about the new characters?
You'll play as Lee Everett who, while trying to escape the events taking place in Atlanta, meets a little girl named Clementine. Because they've both lost their families, they become a family unit over the course of the game.

Will we interact with existing characters from the books or the show?
Yes. This new story allows us to tell some backstory of people and places you'd be familiar with as a fan. The first episode of our game takes place near Atlanta and in Macon, Ga., while Rick Grimes is still in a coma up in Kentucky. During your early travels, you'll meet with Glenn before he becomes a part of what will be Rick's group of survivors.

What look are you trying to achieve with the game?
Our artists are using 2D illustrative techniques to bring texture and detail to a 3D world, and it's worked out in a really exciting way. It looks like high-end concept art and then all of a sudden, the camera shifts and you realize you're looking at a fully 3D scene.

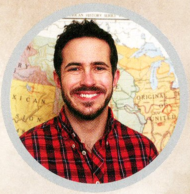
How involved has series creator Robert Kirkman been in the game's development?
Pretty directly. We have great communication with him, and he has never been shy about giving his opinion, which is great. *The Walking Dead* is incredibly important to Robert and to everyone at [publishing imprint] Skybound, so they're very passionate about how the game turns out.

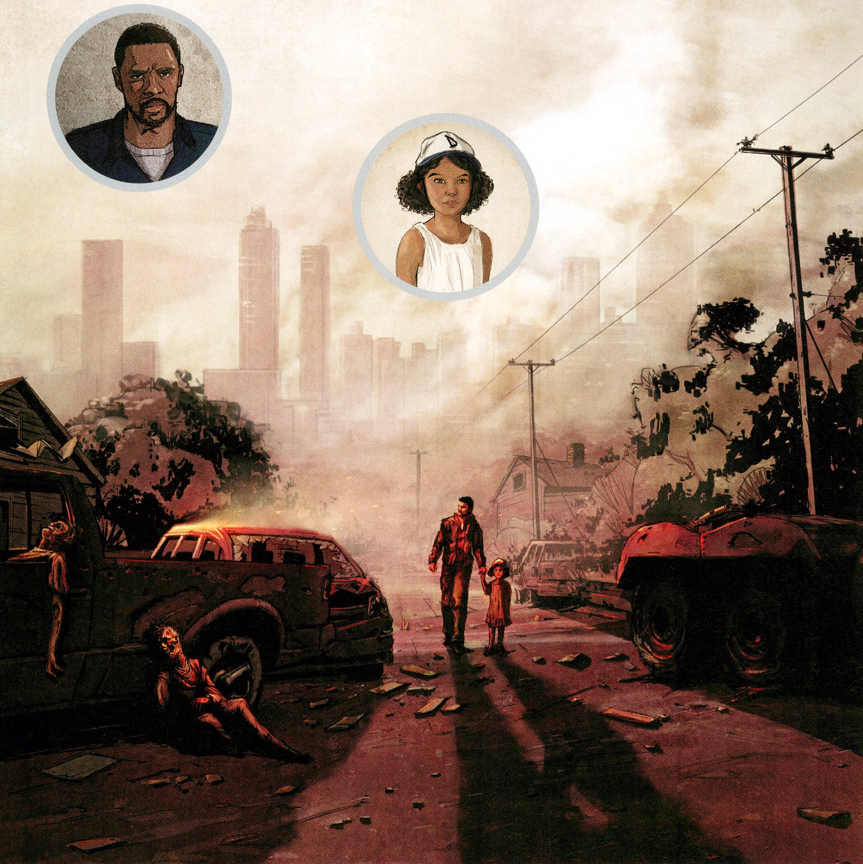
Do you worry that gamers might be suffering a bit of "zombie fatigue" as a result of the incessant inclusion of zombies in games these days?
I think *The Walking Dead* as a whole sits outside of generic zombie fatigue simply because it's proven to be more interesting than that. It's a story that—underneath it all—is so much less about zombies than most of what's out there. Anyone who is even a little familiar with the show or the comics knows it's about the people, it's about drama and emotion, and most games don't tackle that.



Dead is Alive
The Walking Dead is an on-going, Eisner-winning monthly comic book series created by writer Robert Kirkman back in October of 2003. It has since been turned into a TV series on AMC, which, like the books, follows an ever-changing band of survivors trapped in the zombie apocalypse. Go check the comic books out immediately.

"Anyone who is even a little familiar with the comics knows it's about the people, it's about drama and emotion, and most games don't tackle that." *–Sean Vanaman, Telltale Games*





5 Kojima's next game: giant tanks!

Rumored Project Ogre surfaces with sneaking and bras

See-through blouses! That's what we should all be taking away from Hideo Kojima's new game, right? Oh, and the fact the *MGS* genius' new title looks set to be a *Skyrim*-style sandbox (83 percent less lagtastic, please) is kind of a big deal, too. Speaking to CNN, Kojima describes the monstrously named game as "being set in a very open world where players can wander around and explore freely."

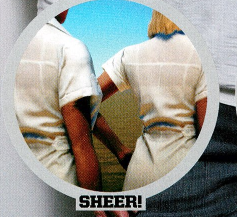
Just before Christmas, Kojima used Twitter to leak three images from the much-rumored Project Ogre. The initial shots merely confirm that tanks and transparent garments will be involved. Woo! All right, so we also know the game runs on the Fox Engine. Internally developed by Kojima Productions, it'll enable the sort of graphics voodoo that makes ladies' lingerie visible through outerwear. And, knowing Kojima, will no doubt provide the platform for incredibly detailed, methodical stealth-based fun. C'mon, look at that tank screen. The guy on the left is absolutely sporting *MGS4*-style crouched couture.

The final image shows a man who'd been scanned into the new engine. Apparently, it only took an hour to make, suggesting creating custom characters in Project Ogre could be a cinch. The idea of scanning your mug to form your own hero fits with one of Kojima's most recent quotes: "Rather than something very cinematic, [I plan to] make something very free." That fits with other comments he made regarding his new bone-crushing project in PTOM issue 55: "It's a very subdued experience—it's a little bit different to what I've done up until now. On the surface it will look similar, but once you get into it hopefully it will be a different experience."

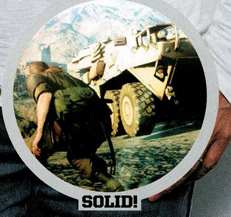
Looking back at *Metal Gear Solid 4*, a lot of pre-release speculation focused around the concept of "nowhere to hide." If Ogre does focus on stealth, could it build upon that ultimately unused idea and create situations where we have to continually adapt to constantly changing cover to avoid enemies? It's a mouth-watering prospect, and one we hope the technically advanced engine can handle.

accessories and clothes
nomdic lined
reversible
zippered
laced chained
blend into one piece
multi-pocketed
saddlebag shaped
wrapped around
mantled
dressed up in it

Hideo Kojima describes Ogre as having "a very wide entrance, a very open entrance."



SHEER!

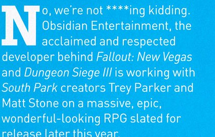


SOLID!

6 A ****ing South Park RPG?

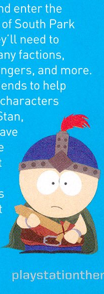
Obsidian is bringing South Park to gaming like never before

No, we're not ****ing kidding. Obsidian Entertainment, the acclaimed and respected developer behind *Fallout: New Vegas* and *Dungeon Siege III* is working with *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone on a massive, epic, wonderful-looking RPG slated for release later this year.



Parker and Stone are more than just "helping out and making fart jokes," too—they're writing the entire script and helping Obsidian bring the wacky town to life. When the battles start, the game's classic turn-based combat system offers real-time inputs for more action-packed gameplay. Obsidian says that the RPG will be as cruel and mean-spirited as the show it's based on, with kids beating the crap out of each other with golf clubs, hammers, and wooden swords—augmented by the colorful imagination of the children, obviously. We imagine that it will be like the episode "Fun Times with Weapons," except maybe with a *Lord of the Rings* theme instead of the anime fights (though we're still crossing our finger for some anime fights).

Players will roll up their own personal 4th grader and enter the savage, corrupt world of South Park Elementary where they'll need to navigate the town's many factions, including Goth kids, Gingers, and more. Luckily, they'll have friends to help them out; befriending characters like Kenny, Cartman, Stan, and Kyle will help us save the town (and likely the world) from some sort of catastrophic evil. In other words: It looks like it's going to be just another day in South Park, Colo.



Game Show
Our four favorite *South Park* gaming references:

"Chinpokomon"
The Japanese game craze comes to America and brainwashes children.

"Make Love, Not Warcraft"
The *South Park* guys worked with Blizzard for this Emmy-winning *WoW* spoof.

"Best Friends Forever"
Kenny finds out that he's "The One" that can help heaven defeat hell...thanks to his PSP.

"Guitar Queer-O"
The kids discover the ups and downs of being a (fake) rock star.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

7

Is the misery over yet for Skyrim fans?

New patch should make "huge difference" to lag woes

Patching a Plan
Skyrim's history of attempted online fixes isn't pretty reading. Both patch 1.2 and 1.3 mostly failed to address the frame rate issues. The former even made things worse by borking magic resistance. 1.3's biggest claim to fame is that it fixed these resistance gaffes, although sadly many people have reported the game crashes more often with this latest patch.

Unless you've been trapped by an arm-amputating rock in a Utah canyon for three months, you know about *Skyrim's* crippling, PS3-specific lag problems. The issue typically crops up around the 30-hour mark, making the game nearly unplayable. Bethesda has released two patches since release, yet the first was more likely to make dragons fly backwards than help the frame rate. So has there been any good news regarding a fix since?

In short: not really. The we-hope-it's-good-news-but-can't-be-sure development was Bethesda's head of PR and marketing Pete Hines confirming patch 1.4 would be released in January. "It's made a huge difference being able to look first-hand at things you were seeing," he announced. "Through this we've learned the game can get in states where it severely taxes the PS3 in particular. We've been working hard to find and fix those with your help." So hopefully, as you're reading this, 1.4 has kiboshed Lagzilla with an online fix to its scaly face. Hopefully.

Rim'll Fix It

If miracles do occur with said patch (so the game you paid 60 bones for finally runs at a playable state 30 hours in) then hoist those Shortswords of Enfeeblement skywards in celebration. But in case your bear-stabbing adventures are still royally borked, Bethesda has at least offered some advice to help alleviate lag. Firstly, they recommend turning off the game's auto-save. This should decrease the rate that save file grows, which has been core to the frame rate woes. Next, clear space on the hard drive. According to the studio "having at least 2GB of free space will help the system memory work with the PlayStation 3's hard drive more effectively." Finally, resting for a few in-game days using the Wait option regularly also allegedly helps.

Less helpfully, the developer also suggests running your console in Safe Mode, a boot device that can be activated by messing around with the power button. As this can potentially break a PS3, we suggest you go ahead and ignore that one. If none of that works, you have our permission to let out an almighty, still frustrated "FUS RO DAH!"

Skyrim has indeed been a dreary experience for many PS3 gamers thanks to its huge lag problems.

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K11
Phillies
2K SPORTS
DATE 2K11
002
PAY TO THE ORDER OF BRIAN KINGREY
$ 1,000,000
ONE MILLION
DOLLARS
MEMO MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K11
2K SPORTS

8 Moneyballer

2K Sports is changing up the rules for MLB 2K12's Perfect Game Challenge

Ever dreamed of making a million bucks by playing a videogame? It's easy, really—just ask Brian Kingrey, winner of 2K Sports' 2011 Perfect Game Challenge. All Kingrey had to do was be the first to pitch a perfect game in *Major League Baseball 2K11* and send the results in to 2K for verification. Well, it was a *little* more complicated than that—the previous Perfect Game Challenges had a mile-long list of requirements, leaving many contestants feeling slighted by the rules. Now, for the release of *MLB 2K12* and this year's Perfect Game Challenge, 2K Sports is changing up the contest rules to create a fair playing field for all. Here's how the new rules work:

Entry

Gone are the days of requiring contestants to set up a video camera to record their perfect game attempts. Instead, *MLB 2K12* will include a built-in game mode specifically for the contest. It's as easy as loading up the game, selecting the mode, and pitching a perfect game. Once that's done, players will receive a verification code to enter online.

Leaderboards

Can't submit your perfect game on day one of *MLB 2K12's* release? Don't sweat it. Contestants will have one month to pitch a perfect game.

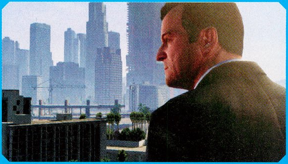
Doing so places contestants on a leaderboard, their position determined by an algorithm that examines the ratings of the pitchers used, as well as which team they pitched against. Only the top eight players on the leaderboard will be eligible to win the money. Players can continue to try and raise their ranking by pitching perfect games with lower-rated pitchers against teams with high batting averages.

Tournament

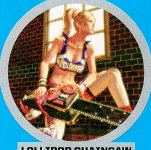
Once the month comes to a close, the top eight players on the Perfect Game leaderboard will be flown out to the MLB Fan Cave in New York City to compete in a *MLB 2K12* tournament. The victor will receive $1 million in prize money. Got what it takes? Get that arm warmed up—*MLB 2K12* releases this March.

9 The Readers' Most Wanted

With *Final Fantasy XIII-2* on shelves, *Grand Theft Auto V* has filled the top spot as it makes its first appearance on our Reader's Most Wanted. Also new to the list are the fantastically gory *Shank 2* and *Game of Thrones*, the game based on the show based on the books. *BioShock Infinite* and *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* are both noticeably absent after holding spots on the list for several months.



01	*Grand Theft Auto V*
02	*Final Fantasy XIV Online*
03	*Street Fighter X Tekken*
04	*DmC: Devil May Cry*
05	*Max Payne 3*
06	*Silent Hill: Downpour*
07	*Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*
08	*Tom Clancy's Rainbow 6: Patriots*
09	*Mass Effect 3*
10	*Ninja Gaiden 3*
11	*Prototype 2*
12	*SSX*
13	*Game of Thrones*
14	*Lollipop Chainsaw*
15	*Anarchy Reigns*
16	*Dragon's Dogma*
17	*Sorcery*
18	*XCOM*
19	*Risen 2: Dark Waters*
20	*Shank 2*


LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW

SORCERY

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling period was December 25, 2011 to January 7, 2012.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

PLAYSTATION 4
SONY

This is a conceptual PS4 design by Australia-based designer Tai Chiem. It has no relation to Sony's actual PS4 design, which is yet to be revealed.

10

Should Sony unveil PlayStation 4 at E3 2012?

Should Sony come out swinging or play it cool? PTOM editors plan for the future

Yes

Says the forward thinking **Scott Butterworth**

Nintendo is preparing to launch its new system—the Wii U—later this year. Rumor has it Microsoft will debut its next console at this year's E3. Yet Sony chairman Kaz Hirai has adamantly refuted the idea that Sony will tease PlayStation 4 any time soon. So here's the big question: Assuming that both of its direct competitors will have new hardware on display at the year's biggest gaming event, why on earth would Sony remain silent? To preserve the PlayStation 3's 10-year life cycle? Oh please.

Let's start with the fact that unveiling the PS4 is not the same as releasing the PS4. Even if Sony decided to give us a small taste of the console's power, the actual release date could still totally be sometime in 2013, 2014, or beyond. Voilà, the 10-year plan is preserved. If Sony is somehow worried that discussing its next system would discourage people from investing in the PS3, here's a reality check: PS4 is going to happen. It *has* to. Every gamer with a pulse already knows this, and yet the PS3 continues to hum along just fine.

And guess what? A PS4 announcement wouldn't hurt PS Vita either. In fact, rather than overshadowing its sleek new handheld, Sony could use the PS4 announce as an opportunity to sell fans on both systems since the two will likely share functionality. Considering the shaky start the PS3 endured, Sony cannot afford to fall behind now.

No

Says the PS3 diehard **Ryan Taljonick**

Scott, you make some excellent points. But let me play devil's advocate for a minute.

Historically speaking, Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony have typically launched new consoles within a year and a half of unveiling the hardware. If those trends continue (Nintendo is already following suit), we could probably expect to see the PlayStation 4 hit shelves late next year. Will this allow Sony to keep up with its competitors? Sure. But is it the best move? Not necessarily.

First, there's a reason new consoles aren't announced three or four years prior to launch: Maintaining marketing buzz for such a huge time span would require a huge amount of resources—resources I'd wager Sony already has tied up in the PS Vita.

Announcing the PS4 on the cusp of the new handheld's arrival is akin to console suicide. The unveiling of the PS4 would *absolutely* overshadow the Vita even if the two do share functionality. Imagine Sony's E3 spokesman: "Hey guys! The Vita just launched a few months ago, we hope you liked it! Now here's another expensive console!"

My prediction? Sony's E3 conference will focus on quality software support for PS3 and Vita. Their new handheld machine needs time to grow and develop. As for the PS3's 10-year life cycle? I see nothing wrong with that—my PS3 *still* does everything I want it to.

TERROR COMES IN MANY FORMS

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SILENT HILL HD COLLECTION

SILENT HILL *Book Of Memories*

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RP-M

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Intense Violence
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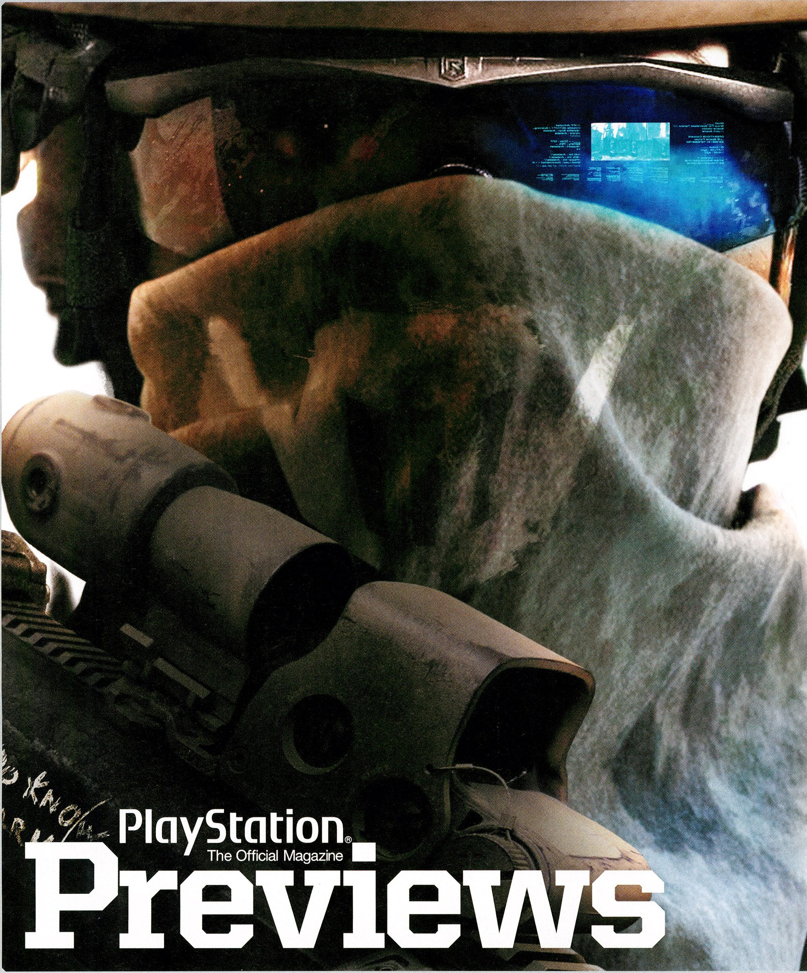


PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

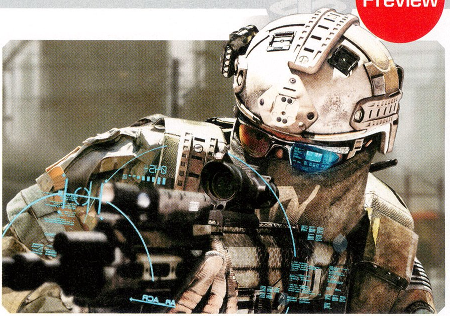
Previews

Quick Pitch

Advanced
We'll have access to all sorts of high-tech gadgetry loosely based on real equipment.

Custom
Every weapon in the game features up to 10 customization points.

Co-op
The entire campaign can be played cooperatively with up to four players.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Paris**

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Future Soldier

Today's soldiers, tomorrow's tech

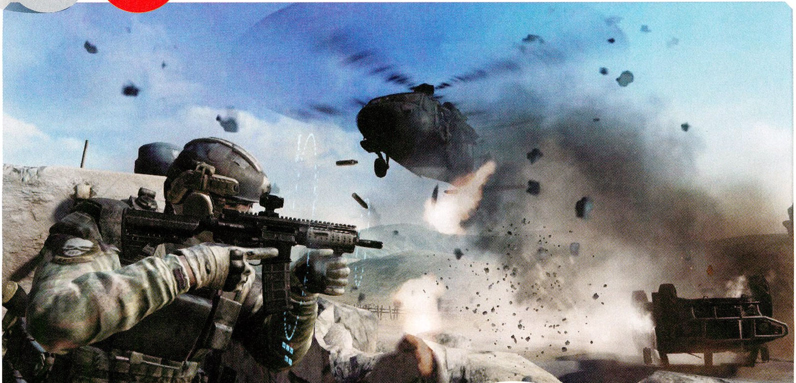
As we passed through the bombed-out mansion our eyes were drawn to its burnt walls and crumbling foundation. How long ago this place had been scorched, we couldn't tell—but one thing was for sure: The village wasn't safe. Down in the streets below, civilians begged for their lives at the hands of militant oppressors.

We exited the building and came to a street barricade. Here, we tossed a Frisbee-sized UAV into the air to gather intel on our surroundings. Handling the remote-controlled drone was a simple task, and we piloted it upwards, discovering a group of five enemy soldiers nearby. Marking the tangos for execution was done with the simple push of a button; the Ghosts in our squad automatically began to acquire their targets. Once we got the bead on our own, the command was given to fire. Bam. Four enemies dead. The final bad guy turned in a panic—but synchronizing our shots activated a brief bullet-time effect, simulating an adrenaline rush. Our blood pumping, we lined up our crosshairs on the target. If he got away, our cover would be blown. We fired. He fell to the road, and the life left his body in a swirl of dust.

Tools of the Trade

Playing *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* in many ways reminded us of the high-tech gadgetry of sci-fi films. An augmented HUD display popped up in our field of vision, denoting important markers, way-points, enemy information, and our ammo count. With it, we were able to mark targets for synchronous shots, a highlight of *Future Soldier's* combat. Doing so enabled us to take down groups of enemies quietly and efficiently, without giving away our

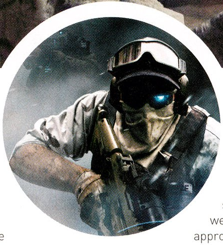
▸▸



Cover realistically chips away as enemies focus their firepower.

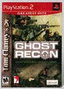
position. The best part about *Future Soldier's* campaign? Up to three other players could join us in co-op at any time, controlling the members of our squad.

Of course, this wouldn't be a proper *Ghost Recon* title without all sorts of high-tech tools. We're talking (mostly) real prototype weaponry and gadgets employed by the most elite special forces in the world. One of *Future Soldier's* most versatile additions is optical camouflage. This piece of equipment is worn by every Ghost in the squad and enables them to turn semi-invisible (similar to the stealth camouflage in *Metal Gear Solid*). Enemies could still see us if we got too close, but we could slip by hostiles unnoticed so long as we moved slowly and kept our distance. It became an indispensable tool in urban environments, especially when we couldn't tell enemies from civilians. Thankfully, we had access to grenade-sized sensors that would highlight hostile forces in red, allowing us to set up clean shots. Or, if we preferred a more direct approach, we could perform stealth kills. These attacks are brutal, especially since the Ghosts don't bother with using knives. Silently approaching a bad guy typically resulted in a point-blank shot to the



When hostiles toss smoke grenades, activate magnetic vision to see through the smokescreen.

Ghost Recon Past and Present



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon
(PS2, 2002)
The first entry in the series was a tactical FPS similar in gameplay to the original *Rainbow Six* titles.

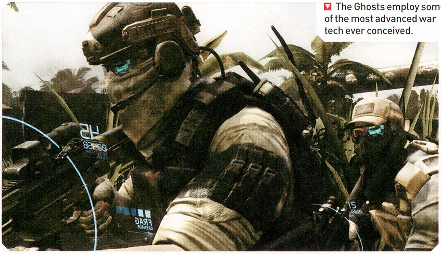
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2
(PS2, 2004)
Ghost Recon 2 introduced an over-the-shoulder view and two new soldier classes: Lone Wolf and Grenadier.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter
(PS2, 2006)
Player control was reduced to a single character with one A.I.-controlled teammate.

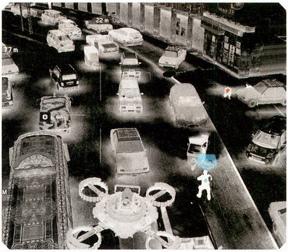
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2
(PS3, 2007)
GRAW 2 had a full squad of four and returned to the third-person viewpoint.

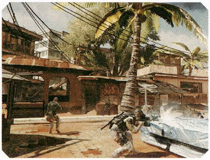
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
(PS3, 2012)
Slick camouflage, fully customizable weapons—this might be the ultimate *Ghost Recon* game.

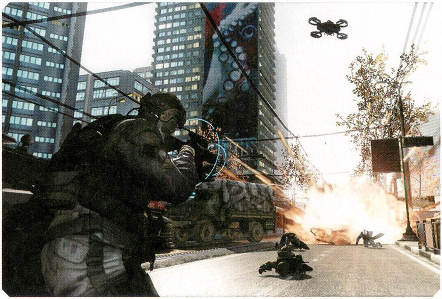
2002 TIMELINE 2012



The Ghosts employ some of the most advanced war tech ever conceived.







The UAV drone (pictured at left and above) is super useful for spotting bad guys and marking them as kill targets.

back of the skull, which, well... Let's just say it isn't pretty.

Sometimes, though, we got caught in intense firefights. Once the bullets started flying, *Future Soldier* became a whole different game. Though we got hung up a few times on the game's snap-to cover system, it mostly worked when we needed it to (keep in mind, we played an early version of the game). Staying in cover too long, though, allowed enemies to zero in on our position and engage in suppressive fire, which made it extremely difficult for us to line up our own shots. Everything on screen would shake as if we were caught in an earthquake, an effective way to convey what we imagine the intensity of a gunfight to be like. Getting blasted with a bunch of bullets caused us to fall to the ground and bleed out (our squad could revive us), but if tangos were lucky enough to land a headshot we were toast.

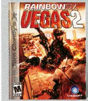
Weapons Locker

Dying made us reconsider our squad's weapons loadout, which is tweaked between each mission via *Future Soldier's* Gunsmith feature. Gun nuts, brace yourselves: Each of the game's 52 weapons can be fully customized. Loading up a gun in the Gunsmith menu presented us with a fully accurate 3D schematic of what the weapon looks like disassembled, down to every last *screw*. From here, we could choose up to 10 different customization points, from the firearm's trigger group (which affects rate of fire) to its gas system—increasing the pressure ramped up the firing speed and recoil, while decreasing the pressure increased accuracy.

> Each of the game's 52 weapons can be fully customized.

There are customization options here we've never seen in a videogame, and we had a surprising amount of fun tweaking our weapons to maximize their effectiveness. There are even options for preset designs based on tactical situations. Need maximum maneuverability? How about a gun suited for long-range encounters? We tailored weapons to fit any of our needs. Indeed, *Future Soldier* shines when it comes to providing us with tools to approach any situation in the manner that best suits our playstyle. Seeing the advanced weaponry of the near future in action is an absolute delight—and with a few more months of field training, *Future Soldier* just might become our next over-the-shoulder obsession. **RYAN TALJONICK**

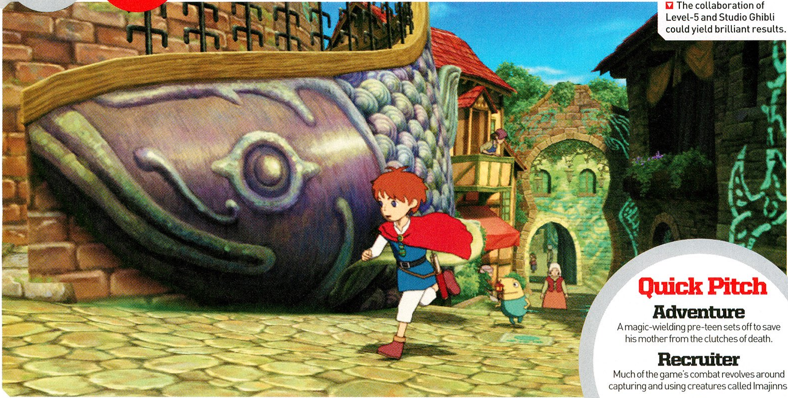
Can't Wait? Play these



Rainbow Six: Vegas 2
Another tactical shooter under the *Tom Clancy* banner, *Rainbow Six: Vegas 2* is an excellent squad-based FPS set in the gaping maw of Sin City.

PS3
SOCOM 4
U.S. NAVY SEALS

SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs
Though not a great game, *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs* is still a comprehensible tactical shooter in which we command two squads of two.



The collaboration of Level-5 and Studio Ghibli could yield brilliant results.

Quick Pitch

Adventure
A magic-wielding pre-teen sets off to save his mother from the clutches of death.

Recruiter
Much of the game's combat revolves around capturing and using creatures called Imajinns.

Epic
Between its main quest and side missions, *Ni no Kuni* will likely take around 50 hours to complete.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Level-5**

Ni no Kuni
Wrath of the White Witch
Taking JRPGs to a new level

Everyone's got a mother. Intrigue, melodrama and sprawling fantasy are fine things, but if a game needs to pull on our deepest emotions, we can all relate to wanting our mommy. In *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch*, Young Oliver's mom suddenly dies after saving her son from drowning. In his bedroom in suburban Hotroit City, he weeps for his loss—and as his tears splash onto a stuffed toy (a gift from his mother), it blooms into life as Shizuku, a fairy from Ni No Kuni, the "Second Land." Shizuku explains that if Oliver can save Ni No Kuni from the white witch Reinus and the evil sorcerer Jabo, he'll be able to revive his mother. Cue dozens of hours of magical adventures.

Anyone who's grinded through *Final Fantasy XIII's* 50-plus hours of bloated whimsy knows that JRPGs have a nasty habit of questing right up their own bottoms. But this collaboration between Level-5 (the company behind *Professor Layton* and *Dragon Quest VIII* and *IX*) and Studio Ghibli (the Japanese equivalent of Disney, responsible for such films as *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*) pools the companies' strengths to offer a compelling story and deep, rewarding gameplay.

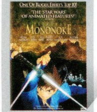
At its heart is a hybrid turn-based, real-time battle system that grows in complexity as the game progresses. Oliver can cast spells to attack and defend, but he also has some help from Imajinns—*Pokémon*-style creatures that level up and evolve through experience and feeding. New ones can be captured in battle, and there are scores of the little critters to collect, each with their own abilities and elemental group. We expect to spend plenty of hours hunting down the strongest of the cuddly things.

Battle Plan

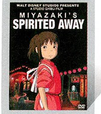
Success in *Ni no Kuni* lies in mastering the attack system; learning when to deploy an Imajinn, cast a spell or block; and watching boss attack patterns for weaknesses. Thankfully Shizuku will aid us in battle, often pointing out the weaknesses of adversaries. Movement around the field is possible between commands, as in *Final Fantasy XII*, while enemies drop green and blue orbs that replenish health and magic points.

The campaign should offer around 50 hours of battles along with gentle but taxing *Layton*-flavored puzzles. Or hang around and explore the towns that become unlocked and take on any of the 100-plus quests (kill this or

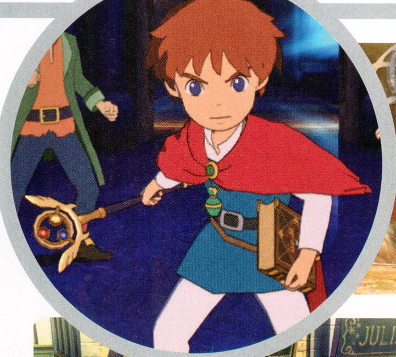
Can't Wait? Watch these

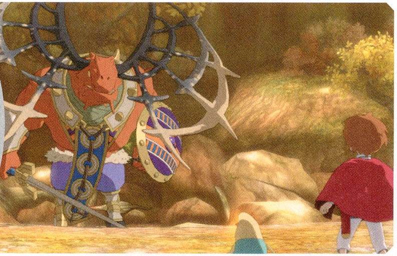

One of Roger Ebert's Top 10!
"The Star Wars of Animated Features"
Mononoke

Princess Mononoke
(1999) A fantastic and epic Studio Ghibli fantasy animation set in Japan's late Muromachi period.

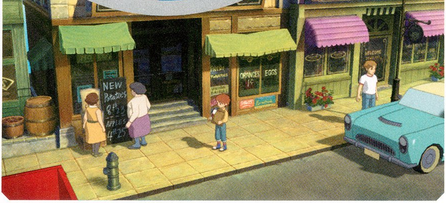


Spirited Away
(2003) A must-see production from Studio Ghibli that tells the story of a young girl stuck in an alternate reality full of monsters.





Yep, this definitely looks like classic Studio Ghibli work. Trust us—that's a good thing.



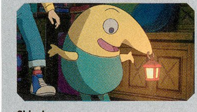
It's warmer and more organic than the ludicrous futurescapes of most JRPGs.

collect that), while helping villagers or upgrading weapons and items in readiness for the next magical scrap.

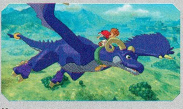
Alternatively, just gawk at the scenery, because this is one of the most gorgeous games on PS3. Studio Ghibli has created the characters, locations and cutscenes, and it shows, with echoes of *Spirited Away's* fantastical creatures, the idealized European architecture of *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and the opulence of *The Cat Returns*. It's a world we're eager to explore, full of incredible detail and magical mystery. It sounds glorious too, thanks to an orchestral soundtrack by Ghibli star composer Joe Hisaishi. If what we've seen so far is any indication of the final product, every element of the game—its masterful animation work, heart-felt story, and expertly crafted orchestrations—melds together to form an experience unlike anything we've seen before.

It's warmer and more organic than the ludicrous futurescapes of most JRPGs—and besides, who wouldn't want to investigate a Studio Ghibli world up close? JAMES COATES

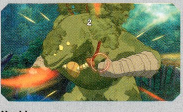
Creature Feature Ni no Kuni's fantastic inhabitants



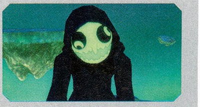
Shizuku
This streetwise fairy leads Oliver on his adventures in the second land, teaching him how to wield magic. He also points out a boss' weak spot during battles.



Kuro
Once befriended, Oliver can mount this mighty beast's back and traverse the huge world map without getting into unnecessary scuffles.



Nushi
A forest guardian gone awry, this creature is straight out of Studio Ghibli classics like *Princess Mononoke* and *Nausicaä*.



Nightmare
Some characters become possessed by a Nightmare and are consequently sapped of their "kindness," turning them into huge jerks.

△ Abusing a certain pitch too often will allow the A.I. to pick up on pitching habbits and land a hit.

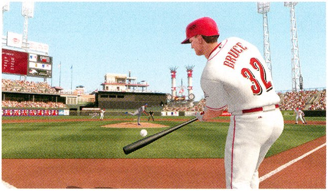
FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **2K Sports** Dev **Visual Concepts**

Major League Baseball 2K12

It's all about the details

When it comes to baseball games, we care a lot about the little things: realistic physics, believable field movement, and intuitive controls. To that effect, developer Visual Concepts is putting their *Major League Baseball 2K* franchise through some intensive spring training in hopes of molding the upcoming *2K12* entry into a homerun hit.

For starters, a slew of tweaks have been added, including more than 80 new hours of commentary as well as improved textures and character animations. Best of all, we caught a glimpse of *2K12's* new physics-based hit distribution. The type and timing of a pitch and swing now determines how and where the ball will travel, mitigating the alarmingly high number of lineouts to infielders we saw in last year's entry. *2K12's* biggest addition, though, is its MLB Today Season Mode, which lets us play a virtual season as our favorite team in a real-time parallel to their actual season. Simply by playing on our team's actual game day, we can compare our outcome to theirs. Forgo playing a game, however, and the real team's outcome is slotted into our virtual team's seasonal statistics. Too bad *2K11* didn't have this feature—we could've helped the Texas Rangers win the World Series. **RYAN TALJONICK**



△ The baseball reacts more realistically in *MLB 2K12*. Hits will no longer defy the laws of physics.

△ The savior of many a fantasy league team, Detroit Tiger's pitcher Justin Verlander will grace the game's cover.

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The above image is not representative of actual in-game visuals.

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY
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Alcohol Reference
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

PSVITA
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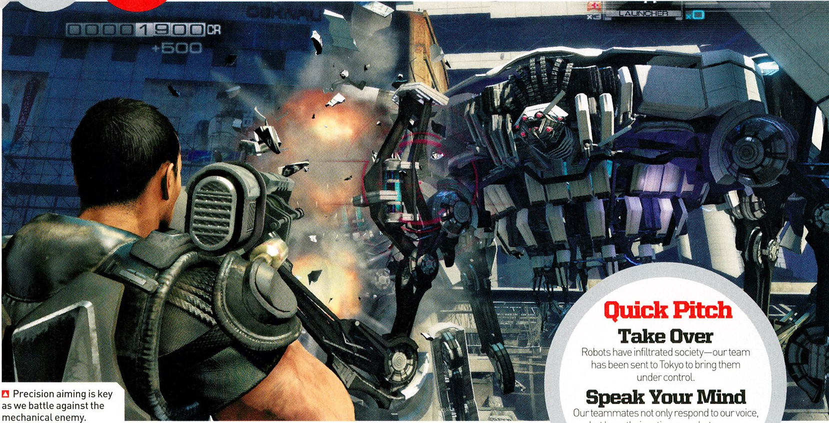


▲ Precision aiming is key as we battle against the mechanical enemy.

Quick Pitch

Take Over

Robots have infiltrated society—our team has been sent to Tokyo to bring them under control.

Speak Your Mind

Our teammates not only respond to our voice, but base their actions on what we say.

Take Aim

Highly detailed procedural damage mechanics.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **Sega** Dev **Yakuza Studios**

Binary Domain

Terminators take over Tokyo

Ever sworn at NPC teammates in utter frustration? Chances are they'll swear back in new third-person shooter *Binary Domain*. From newly formed Yakuza Studios, this aims to be far more than an ordinary shooter. Not only are we invading 2080 Tokyo to prevent a robot uprising, we also have to maintain our team's trust. "Anything you say or do in any given situation can change the NPCs' trust in you," explains producer Masayoshi Kikuchi. "You're essentially building up a relationship with them. Ultimately, depending on which character you have the highest trust level with, it might affect how the story unfolds."

It's instantly apparent from our hands-on with the first two chapters how vitally important these relationships are. Communicating with our team via headset is painless, as the in-game voice-recognition is surprisingly effective. From simple instructions to thanking teammates for a good job, it's a slick process with instant results—shoot our teammate by accident, though, and they'll betray us. Apologize and they gruffly accept, forgiving us for riddling them with bullets.

Deep and meaningful

Kikuchi is quick to point out that these relationships aren't just to complete missions more effectively. "It's not just a purpose-based relationship; it has an emotional level," he says. "They have their individual personalities as well. We want players to feel like these are their very own team members."

We'll need a solid team to fight off the automatonic hordes. A powerful A.I. engine gives enemies a sense of their entire body. Shoot off an arm carrying a weapon and the Cyberman wannabe will pick it back up with its remaining arm and empty the clip.

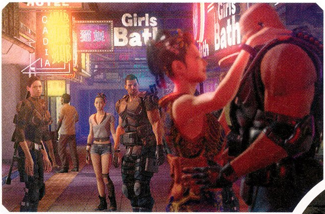
The precision aiming is highly detailed, too, as we discovered when we blew off both of a robot's legs. It proceeded to drag itself along the ground, zombie-like, to fulfil its mission. "They aren't all humanoid shapes," Kikuchi tells us. "Players are encouraged to assess how they move, what weapons they have, and, most importantly, what the most effective way is to take down a particular robot." When asked if it was intentional to create a game about human interactions while pitted against machines, Kikuchi pauses. "We hope it provokes a moral thinking within players," he says. "The whole 'man and machine' theme runs through the game." What initially seemed like a gimmick became second nature as we naturally started replying to our teammates. We'll be curse-free in no time at all.

JAMES COATES

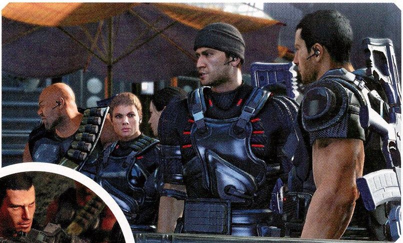
Dev Talk

"There is a moral theme. It's becoming ever more immediate as technology progresses. Japan's always been at the forefront of robotics. It's [a theme] that, whether it's [based on] fictional or factual reference points, the team is familiar with."

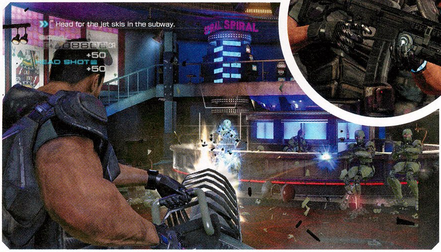
Masayoshi Kikuchi
Producer,
Yakuza Studios


HOTEL
CADIA
Girls Bath
Girls Bath

It's all about building, ahem, meaningful relationships.



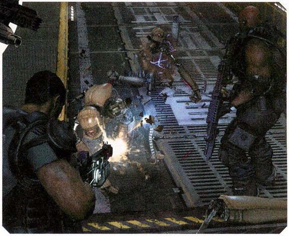
Should we trust this lot to save the human race?

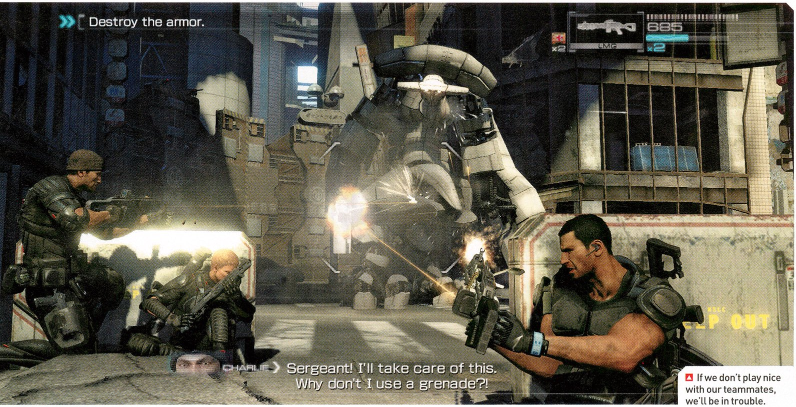


Head for the jet skis in the subway.

SPIRAL SPIRAL
+50
HEAD SHOT
+50

Give those machines a taste of their own medicine by using their weapons against them.



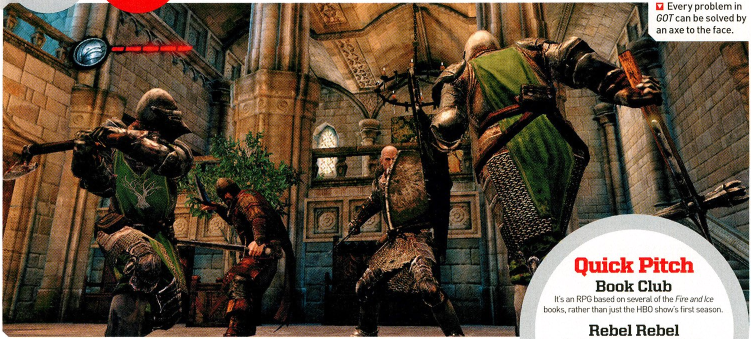


Destroy the armor.

CHARLIE Sergeant! I'll take care of this. Why don't I use a grenade?!

LMG
685
x2
x2
ELP OUT

If we don't play nice with our teammates, we'll be in trouble.



Every problem in *GOT* can be solved by an axe to the face.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **Atlus** Dev **Cyanide Studios**

Game of Thrones

George R.R. Martin's saga comes to life

Man, it would be awesome if this ended up not sucking. After all, the smash-hit HBO sword and sorcery series is officially the donkey's dangly bits thanks to dragons, Sean Bean's Sheffield-accented brand of chivalry, and more nudity than a grubby Skinemax flick. And dare we say, the first trailer from Cyanide Studios' action RPG actually looks fairly decent.

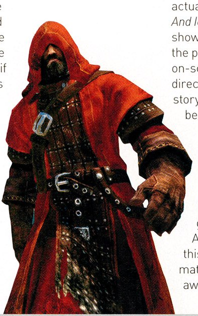
Having just released an all right(ish) PC RTS based on the hit show, the studio's latest effort looks to be decidedly more ambitious. The first thing that's apparent from the trailer is how faithfully the action mirrors the program's settings. From the permanent twilight of the Wall, to the frozen lands of Winterfell, the footage looks like it's been ripped straight from the HBO series. The game seems to have captured the show's unflinching brutality, too, if a brief bludgeony torture scene is anything to go by. Ouch.

Acting Up

Also encouraging is the presence of several actors from the series. Already confirmed are James Cosmo (the beardy Scottish guy from *Trainspotting* and *Troy*), who plays leader of the Night's Watch Jeor Mormont, and George R.R. Martin. If you haven't heard of the latter name, his presence is a big deal. Martin is actually the writer of *A Song of Fire And Ice*—the series of books the show is based on. Not only does the portly gent appear in a cheeky on-screen cameo, but he's also directly involved in the game's story and scenarios. That can't be a bad thing.

Admittedly, we're not too sure about the smoke monster that pops up near the trailer's end. It hints that this RPG will be more fantastical than its relatively grounded source material.

At any rate, we'll soon know if this lives up to its ace source material, as it's but a mere month away. **JAMES COATES**



Quick Pitch

Book Club

It's an RPG based on several of the *Fire and Ice* books, rather than just the HBO show's first season.

Rebel Rebel

Characters are ex-members of Robert's Rebellion, battling across the Seven Kingdoms.

Total Impact

Our interactions and combat choices have a sizeable impact on the game's world.

Five Good Reasons Game of Thrones could be a happy surprise

1 **Its story should be amazing**
George R.R. Martin's involvement means this should spin a cracking yarn, which is vital for any RPG. Fingers crossed.

2 **There are multiple classes**
The trailer shows theives, mages, and axe-wielding warriors, meaning there's hopefully lots of customization.

3 **Possible parallel plots**
Multiple characters could mean *Pulp Fiction*-like crossing plots. Ned Stark's caught himself a couple of flies.

4 **Could be as long as a Northern winter**
Cyanide promises the game will have a 30-plus hour story, enough time for about 14,000 decapitations.

5 **Combat sounds part D&D, part Max Payne**
The dev says it's an "active slowdown tactical combat engine." So...bullet time with maces.

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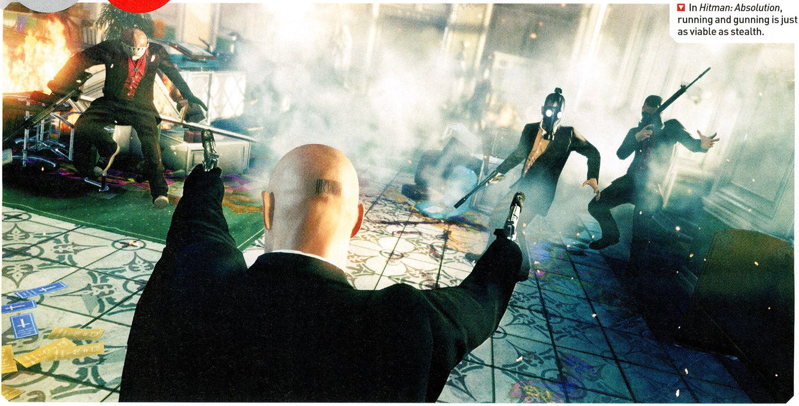


In *Hitman: Absolution*, running and gunning is just as viable as stealth.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **IO Interactive**

Hitman Absolution

Variety is the spice of death

Developer IO Interactive's stealth-action *Hitman* series has always been about freedom and choice; armchair assassins were afforded the freedom to plot their murderous paths through a sandbox-y mission structure and were then given a variety of choices as to how they'd snuff the final breaths from their targets. Despite encouraging experimentation, though, the games never really catered to those who preferred a gun over a garrote. Sure, emptying clips into fools indiscriminately was allowed, but as IO lead producer Hakan Abrak admits, this option was generally considered the "wrong" one. In his team's forthcoming *Hitman: Absolution*, this is no longer the case.

Don't misunderstand. The sequel isn't sacrificing any of the series' signature stealth appeal to appease the trigger-happy *Call of Duty* crowd; bar-coded badass Agent 47 still snaps necks like pretzel rods, sneaks in the shadows, dons disguises, and delivers death with surgical precision. In fact, players will need to adopt a playstyle that makes Sam Fisher look like a bull in a China shop if they wish to gain *Absolution's* coveted Silent Assassin rating. That said, the contract killer with the shorn scalp will feel just as comfortable shouldering a hand-cannon as he does clutching a poison-filled syringe.

Pick Your Poison

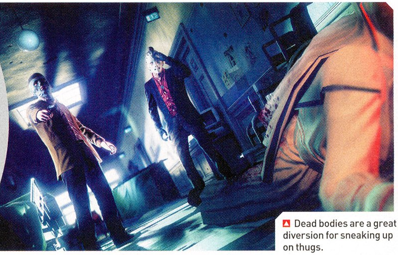
To prove that delivering death with brutality over finesse is now more than just a last resort when plan A fails, IO demoed the same level for us twice; first playing it stealthy, then bringing the big guns on the second go-round. Unfolding in a Chicago orphanage where 47—and a dozen or so well-armed thugs—were searching for a girl named Victoria, the initial playthrough would've felt comfortably familiar to any fan who's stuffed an unconscious body in a closet or patiently lurked in the shadows to evade enemy detection. The titular killer—disguised as a priest, no less—tosses a toy robot to distract a trio of foes, creeps through a ceiling vent, and even hides in a wardrobe right next to one of his victims.

Despite still sporting the white collar, 47 plays it more Jason Bourne than man-of-the-cloth on the second attempt. This time, rather than chucking the child's plaything to distract the three thugs, he uses it to directly draw their attention. Picking up a fireman's axe on the fly, he uses its blade to rearrange the first two goons' ribcages, then hurls it into the head of the third henchman. Turns out this group of now-bleeding-out bad guys was holding a hostage who possesses valuable information; apparently, a shotgun is hidden in the orphanage's chapel. While this vital piece of intel

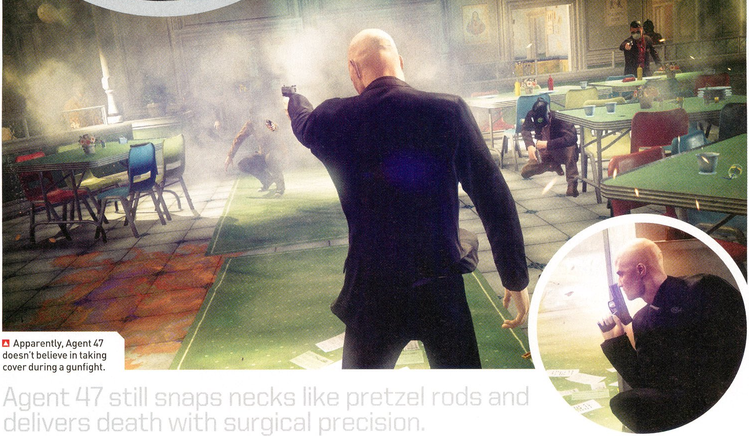
Dev Talk

"If you play stealthy, you'll get a lot more fidelity than in earlier games, but if you want to play more aggressive, that should be a compelling experience as well."

Hakan Abrak
Lead Producer



Dead bodies are a great diversion for sneaking up on thugs.



Apparently, Agent 47 doesn't believe in taking cover during a gunfight.

Agent 47 still snaps necks like pretzel rods and delivers death with surgical precision.

was entirely missed on the stealth run, our demoer more than makes up for this on his second playthrough.

Trading between the newly acquired buckshot-blaster and his trademark pair of pistols, 47 begins painting the walls with the pulpy innards of his attackers. While utilizing cover spots—another new addition—he conducts an orchestra of chaos with the gracefulness of a John Woo protagonist. Complementing his bullet ballet is Instinct mode, stealthily spent in the previous demo to scout enemy patrol paths and peer through walls, which he uses to trigger Point Shooting; much like *Red Dead Redemption's* Dead Eye mechanic, this trick allows players to mark multiple targets before triggering a cinematic slo-mo massacre.

In concluding the demo, IO assures the title's dynamic design will not only allow for full-on stealth or aggression, but also afford players the opportunity to tread the tricky path between the two styles. While we were no doubt impressed by 47's ability to tackle the same mission with two vastly different approaches, it's this promise of playing somewhere down the middle that's really got us polishing our Silverballers. **MATT CABRAL**

▼ Scuff a shot and a gung-ho mop up section might occur.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **City Interactive** Dev **City Interactive**

Sniper Ghost Warrior 2

Stealthy, sniper-focused shooter takes aim on prequel's failings

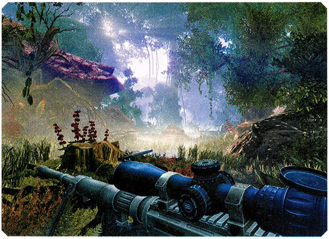
This looks the part and sounds the part, but the spectre of the original looms large. Despite shifting a million copies, the prequel was littered with problems: A.I. that zeroed in from two miles away if we so much as stood on a twig, then didn't react when we stood next to them; clumsy stealth; glitches; hokey story...it went on. The devs at City Interactive recognize this, and promise fixes.

Visually, *Warrior 2* compares favorably on PS3. Running on the gorgeous CryEngine 3—as seen in *Crysis 2*—it's a feast of vibrant colors and lifelike foliage.

Through the lens of a sniper scope we could see key changes in A.I.: enemies reacted to missed shots, ducking for cover and working together to attack intelligently. When our bullet hits its target, enemies go down silently without raising the alarm.

Played right, it's empowering. Set pieces, such as the downing of a chopper, are strong—if in need of refinement—but the dialogue remains a bit ripe. "Those latte-sipping cubicle jockies at Langley forgot to mention that little detail!" Riiight.

Warrior 2 still has room for polish and to have something added to its familiar, yet inverted, setting—sniper sections are usually a change of pace, but here it's the main game, albeit one enlivened with knife kills and the trademark slo-mo bullet cam. JAMES COATES

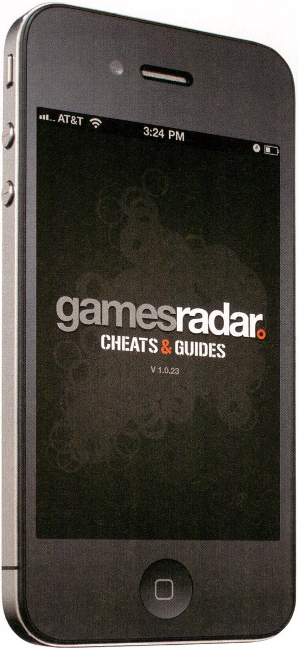


▲ Lush CryEngine jungles—without the garbage aliens.

▲ Take down choppers by precision targeting the pilot.

“★★★★★” Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz



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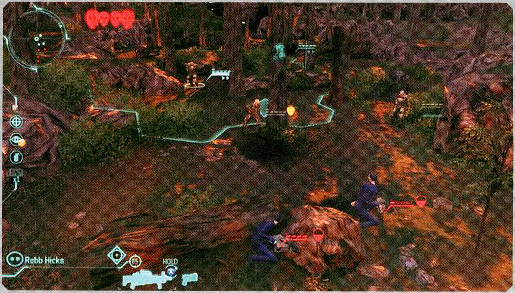
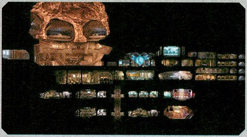
XCOM: Enemy Unknown

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Firaxis Games**

When it was announced that 2K Marin would be rebooting the *X-COM* franchise as a first-person shooter re-typeset as *XCOM*, longtime fans of the series were understandably upset. After all, the original games were steeped in complex turn-based strategy. Now, Firaxis Games (developers of the PC strategy franchise *Civilization*) is working on a new game separate from 2K Marin's project—a reimagining that draws upon *X-COM* roots for inspiration. Dubbed *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, this title lets players recruit and train agents, develop new technology, and engage in strategic ground-based combat.





Syndicate

Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Starbreeze AB**

Our latest look at this futuristic shooter reveals the Deep Dive four-player co-op mode. Agents Tihomir Darius, Emma Thalos, Akuma, and Aidan Fall must combat enemy corporations through nine objective-based missions from the original *Syndicate* game.

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City

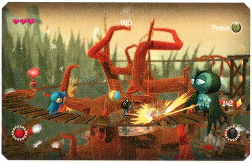
Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Slant Six Games**

A recent cinematic trailer showcases the array of special abilities possessed by the Umbrella Security Services elites, as well the team of Spec Ops soldiers sent to Raccoon City to determine the cause of the viral outbreak.

Mortal Kombat: Komplete Edition

Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.**
Dev **NetherRealm Studios**

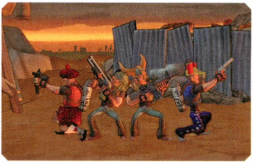
Mortal Kombat: Komplete Edition will come with the full retail game and all the DLC released to this point—including the four downloadable characters—as well as the 1995 *Mortal Kombat* movie, 15 skins, and 3 Klassic Fatalities.



Scarygirl

Format **PS3** ETA **Q1** Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **TikGames**

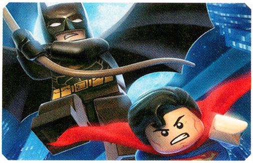
Based on the award-winning graphic novel of the same name, *Scarygirl* is a platformer about a young girl with a tentacle for an arm. It employs a fantastic art style similar to the one seen in the comic, and fans will appreciate the standalone story.



Shoot Many Robots

Format **PSN** ETA **Q1** Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Demiurge Studios**

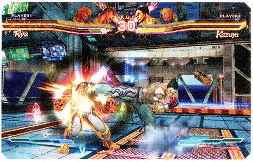
We love it when a title tells us exactly what a game expects us to do. In *Shoot Many Robots* up to four players can work together to destroy those menacing mechanical creations as a group of hillbillies. Guns, beer, and lots of shootin'—what's not to love?



LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes

Format **PS3/Vita** ETA **Summer** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **Traveller's Tales**

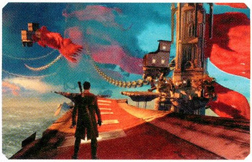
Hail, hail, the gang's all here! Batman and Robin are joined by other Justice Leaguers, including Superman, Wonder Woman, and Green Lantern. We all know new LEGO superheroes means new LEGO abilities to play with.



Street Fighter X Tekken

Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**

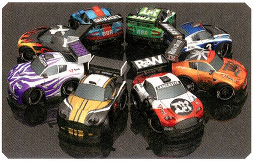
The gem system in *Street Fighter X Tekken* allows players to increase character strengths. Boost gems increase a character's parameters during battle while Assist gems support a player's natural abilities, offering new strategies for vets or protection for beginners.



DmC: Devil May Cry

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Ninja Theory**

Wicked aerial combos, a mysterious female companion, and weapons never seen before in *Devil May Cry*—Dante will have to use all the tricks in the book to escape the bizarre, colorful Limbo and those trying to hunt him down. Who knew evil could look so pretty?



Bang Bang Racing

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD** Pub **Digital Reality**
Dev **Digital Reality**

Bang Bang Racing—an adorable arcade racer that features 20 different vehicles across four different car classes, including tough-to-master speedsters—offers up to four-player co-op racing (in local splitscreen) across a variety of tracks set around the globe.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲No SOPA For You

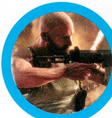
Thankfully Sony has withdrawn its SOPA support. We're one step closer to seeing SOPA revised.

▲Waka Waka

A teaser for the Vita version of *Street Fighter X Tekken* shows the silhouette of a familiar yellow dot-muncher: Pac-Man.

▲Turn Here, You Monster

A kindly Reddit user has given Garmin GPS owners the gift of GLaDOS' sweet, sweet voice. We keep getting lost to hear more.



▼It Pains Us

Max Payne 3 has been delayed until May and we're already feeling the depression and impatience set in.

▼NeXt Year

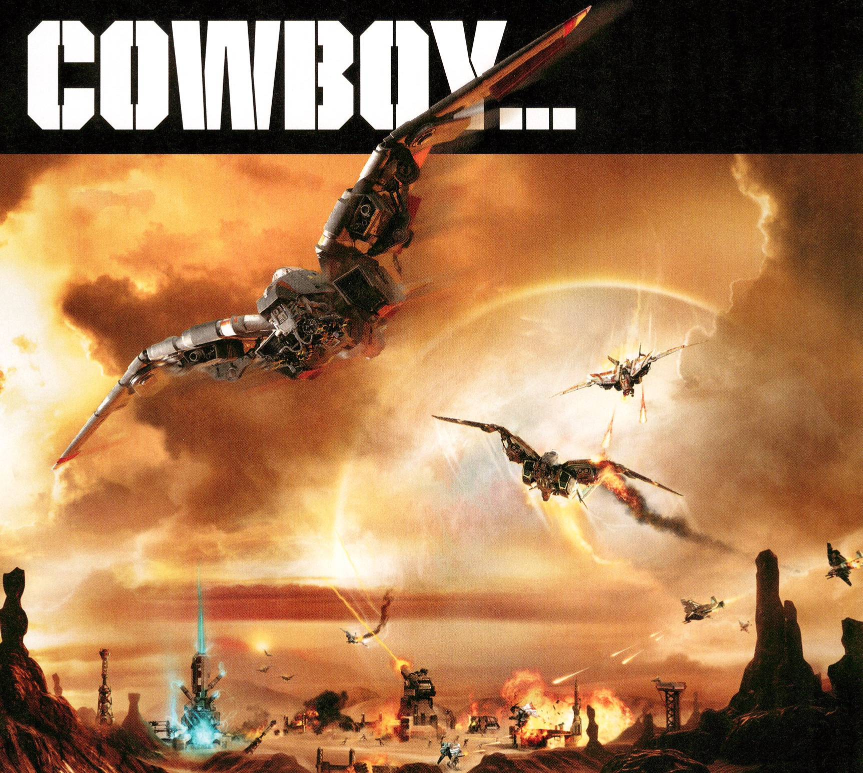
XCOM has been pushed to 2013, but we should still see *XCOM: Enemy Unkown* in 2012.

▼Sell Out

Sonic is doing Progressive commercials now. We'll have to ask if Flo is as nice in person as she is on TV.

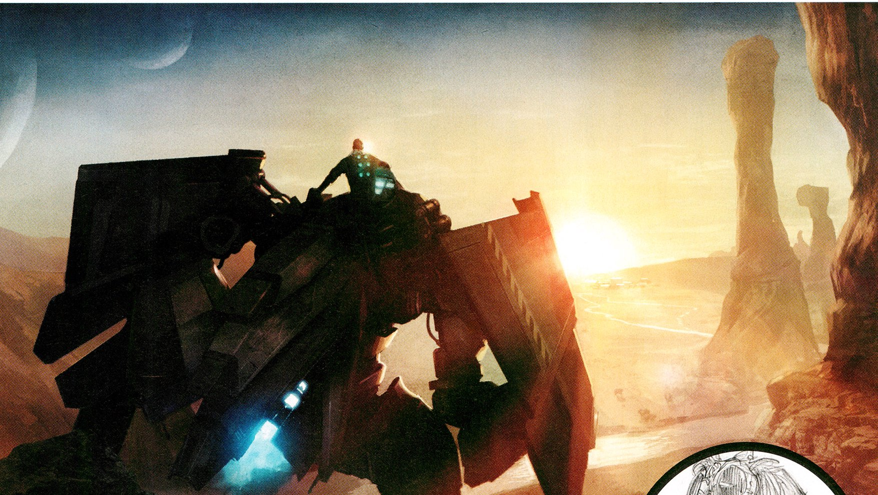
HOWDY, SPACE

COWBOY...



Six-shooters and starships collide as real-time strategy-infused shooter **Starhawk** arrives from the far reaches of space. We crack open the campaign *Warhawk* never had and detail what's still to come from PS3's next great multiplayer obsession. **BY SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **SCEA** Dev **LightBox Interactive**



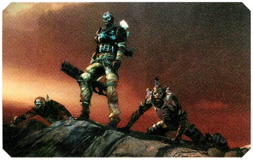
Ah, the Space Western, that curious and magical intersection of Wild West themes and deep space technology, where showdowns at high noon are fought with plasma pistols and the steed of choice is a jet bike. It's an oddly compelling juxtaposition that captures the gritty determination, wild optimism, and liberating independence of a life built with one's own hands… But, you know, with lasers and stuff. Shows like *Firefly* and games like *Borderlands* have worn it well, and now it's emerged as the thematic backdrop for *Starhawk*, which launches into the far reaches of freshly colonized space during what can only be described as a sci-fi version of the Gold Rush.

Yet this unlikely pairing of cowboys and cosmonauts is not the game's most unexpected marriage—that honor goes to *Starhawk's* gameplay, which unites two equally unlikely genres: real-time strategy and third-person shooting.

Since *Starhawk* is the spiritual successor to multiplayer-only vehicle combat title *Warhawk*, much of the game's content was preordained. In *Warhawk*, players were dropped into enclosed environments populated with tanks, jeeps, and the titular planes. From there, everyone basically blasted each other to dust using everything from standard handheld assault rifles to any of the Hawk's nine weapons.

In *Starhawk*, that formula remains largely the same: players can still commandeer a (now slightly wider) variety of vehicles—including Hawks, jeeps, tanks, jetpacks, and more—or choose to simply huff it on foot while wielding a firearm or two.

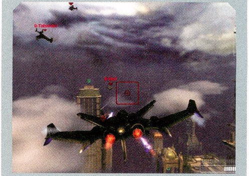
But *Starhawk* does far more than throw on a 10-gallon hat and fire up a few new vehicles. It also adds an on-the-fly construction mechanic called Build & Battle. At any time, players can tap the Triangle button to bring up a radial menu containing a selection of buildable units, from auto-turrets to supply bunkers to Hawk launch pads. Assuming they've collected enough energy (either by killing enemies or standing near a glowing energy source), they can immediately call



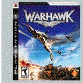
OUTER SPUR
SHIPPING CO

When it comes to building a new universe, attention to detail is key. Keep an eye out for the small stuff.

'STARHAWK DOES FAR MORE THAN THROW ON A HAT AND FIRE UP NEW VEHICLES."



BIRDS OF A FEATHER



There's a reason the name *Starhawk* sounds familiar. Though the game is technically a new IP, it owes a great debt to its spiritual forefather: *Warhawk*, a downloadable, multiplayer-only PS3 exclusive that proved to be a major staple in the console's early life cycle. By showcasing the system's immense online capabilities, it earned a solid critical reception, strong commercial success, and an ardent fan base that still actively plays the game, more than four years after its initial release.

Though *Starhawk* grows the original formula and develops its own universe, *Warhawk's* frenetic mix of aerial and terrestrial vehicle combat still provides the game's foundation. "We really wanted to make a game that used the same gameplay recipe as a starting point," explains LightBox Interactive's Dylan Jobe, whose previous studio, Incognito Entertainment, developed *Warhawk*. "I mean, our plane transforms into a robot. We didn't have *that* in *Warhawk*. But the pacing of combat, the style—the kind of fast-paced vehicle combat—and the core bone structure of how maps are laid out, it's the same stuff."

202-B
DANGER

down the structure from space. That's right, it drops *from space*...or at least an orbiting space station. Close enough. Once on the ground, the installation will self-assemble and be fully operational in just seconds.

"HAWKS SOARING OVERHEAD, ROCKETS SLAMMING INTO WALLS—PANDEMONIUM!"

Manifest Destiny

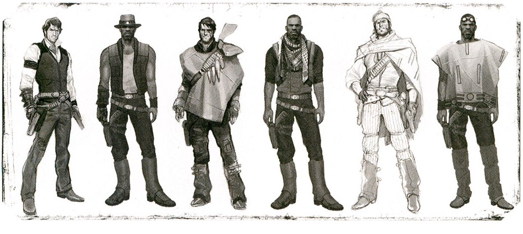
Players can still opt to simply play the game as a standard third-person shooter—easy enough considering its strong suite of shooter mechanics, like a tight over-the-shoulder camera, down-sight aiming, and regenerating health. But with this new system, they can also manage the flow of combat by building, say, a sniper tower or a vehicle-spawning garage or a quintessential bubble forcefield. With over a dozen structures total, the strategic options are practically limitless. And it's important to note that the incredibly streamlined Build & Battle process happens entirely in real-time. There are no messy menus, no micromanagement, and no immersion-killing top-down tedium. It's just like throwing a grenade except instead of exploding, the grenade, well, becomes a building.

Of course, this means there could potentially be a whole lot happening on screen at any given moment: Hawks soaring overhead, rockets slamming into walls, jeeps darting in and out of bases, entire buildings dropping onto the battlefield and crushing everything underneath—pandemonium! Plus, when players can simply build anything they could possibly need, figuring out where to start might be tough. With so many gameplay options and so much sensory overload, how will the developers make the experience manageable? By remedying one of *Warhawk's* greatest shortcomings and including a single-player campaign.

"In multiplayer, there's no handholding, but the single-player campaign not only tells a great story but does a fair bit of well-camouflaged handholding for the Build & Battle system," reveals LightBox Interactive president Dylan Jobe. "In the first two missions specifically, [we] just try to reinforce the fact that this is different from all the other shooters you've played." The very first mission starts players off with the bare essentials: a gun, a wall unit, and a horde of enemies. Though the game doesn't explicitly instruct players to use the wall piece to manage the incoming onslaught, most savvy soldiers should be able to figure it out on their own. From there, the game continues to dole out new elements at regular intervals—enough to keep players engaged without feeling distracted or overwhelmed.

Quick Draw

The result, according to the team, is a



◄ The LightBox art team drew heavily on the films of Sergio Leone when creating the game's aesthetic.

campaign that not only equips players with essential knowledge but provides a massive amount of variety as well. "It didn't make sense to do a really traditional shooter campaign where you're kind of always on the ground with your gun and running down the little corridor killing dudes and breaching doors," explains lead game designer Josh Sutphin. "We have all this other mechanical variety, so we wanted to find ways to use it. We try to have these big shifts from mission to mission so you're not just repeating the same kind of gameplay."

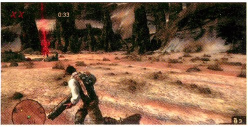
While one portion might feel like a multi-objective flight mission ripped straight from an *Ace Combat* game, the next might challenge players to snipe targets on foot or hop into a tank and barrel into an enemy base or provide ground support for ally troops, all while implementing the Build & Battle system both offensively and defensively. Also, space. "We definitely wanted to try and sell that [space warfare] fantasy," enthuses Sutphin. "We've got stuff where you're doing the dogfight in space and you've got, you know, the big anti-fighter lasers cutting through the sky and there are asteroid fields and dust clouds and big, pretty colored nebula and all that kind of stuff."

In addition to pacing out the mechanics across the campaign's wildly diverse mission set, the developers at LightBox have worked to ensure that all the disparate components feel accessible even before players have developed "full competency" of the Build & Battle system. "Part of it is, we think of ourselves as a spiritual successor to *Warhawk*," explains Sutphin. "*Warhawk* is a pretty fast-paced, pretty arcade-y game. *Warhawk's* mechanics were kind of like driving a car. You just push right and the plane turns right and it kind of handles all of the sim-y mechanics for you. There's a level of accessibility and pick-up-and-play that we wanted to preserve. We wanted to preserve the quick pace."

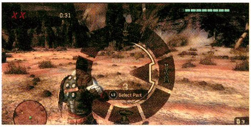
In our time piloting the game's Hawks, that quick pace certainly shined through. Similar

DECONSTRUCTED

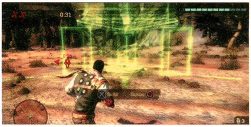
The Build & Battle system lets players construct installations on the fly. Here's a step-by-step look at how it works in game.



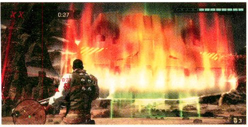
While the moment-to-moment gameplay feels consistent with a standard third-person shooter, players can choose to build at any time on any open patch of land.



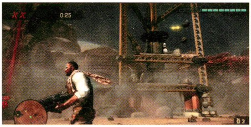
Simply tap Triangle to bring up the build menu. This in no way pauses the game or changes the camera or shooting controls. Everything occurs in real time.



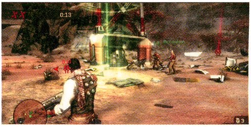
Once an installation is selected, a glowing hologram appears to aid in placement. For larger structures, the camera pulls back to offer a better view of the battlefield.



Assuming players have enough Rift energy to "purchase" the structure (see the blue bar in the upper right?), it immediately shoots down from space.



At this point, players can stand back and watch as the building rapidly assembles itself. The entire Build & Battle process takes 15 to 20 seconds from start to finish.



Once assembled, the building is immediately available for use. In the case of this Pod Beacon, players can join forces with the A.I. allies that are now able to spawn there.

to flying a jet in *Battlefield 3*, the Left-analog stick controls all of the ship's movement, making for a simple and intuitive experience. But we were also pleased to discover "Advanced Flight Mode," which switches the entire control scheme to something more akin to a traditional flight sim. "We're not trying to strip the hardcore elements out and, as some people would say, 'dumb down the game' into something more casual," says Sutphin. "I don't really think of it along that spectrum. The whole approach is about making a nice, deep, hardcore-appealing core game first, nail that, and then when that's great, build accessibility around that."

Hired Gun

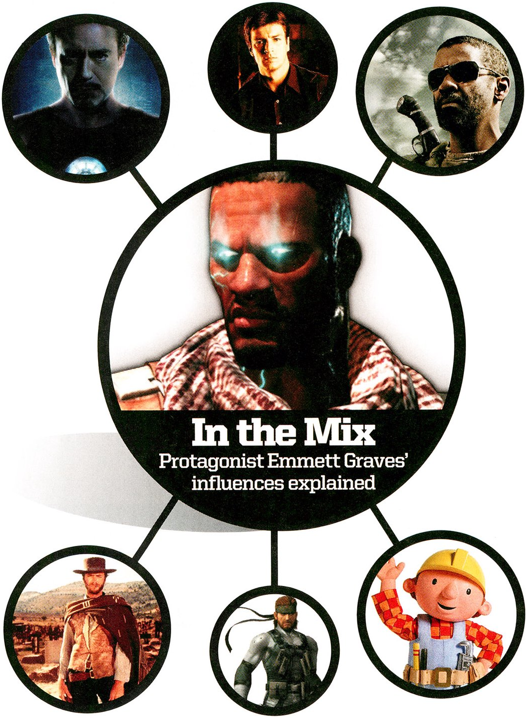
The addition of *Starhawk's* single-player component also provides a fresh opportunity for storytelling that the developers were more than happy to capitalize on. At the center of the narrative: Rift energy, a highly unstable resource found in the far reaches of space that, much like oil, can be mined and refined into fuel. But in addition to being extremely valuable, it's incredibly toxic, and anyone who's directly exposed to it either dies or mutates into a twisted psychopath called an Outcast...with one exception: gruff and tragic leading man Emmett Graves.

Thanks to the technology of his partner Sydney Cutter, Emmett hasn't completely succumbed to his rift poisoning, though he physically suffers and, in moments of extreme stress, can actually experience what the developers call "Rift seizures." Despite not fully mutating into an Outcast, he's ostracized from civil society and forced to embrace life as a Rift salvager—a hired mercenary of sorts paid to keep marauding Outcast war bands at bay so Rift miners can meet their quotas and keep their lucrative contracts with the Rift Union.

Thanks to Emmett's understandable fearlessness and Cutter's remarkable Build & Battle technology, the two have made the most of their opportunistic occupation, but at the same time, Emmett's hardly a hero. "As a character, Emmett is trapped between two worlds," explains creative director Lars DeVore. "He is not a Rifter. He is not fighting altruistically for the Rift Union. He is doing it for his own gain." Of course, this is exactly the

In the Mix

Protagonist Emmett Graves' influences explained



Tony Stark
No, Emmett isn't a billionaire playboy philanthropist, but he does suffer a potentially life-threatening physical condition that's managed only by technology that's been integrated into his body.

Malcolm Reynolds
Like the beloved captain from Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, Emmett isn't exactly a typical white-hat good guy. He's more of a mercenary who's just trying to look out for himself and his crew. See also: Han Solo.

The Book of Eli
According to creative director Lars Devore, Emmett's look was heavily influenced by Denzel Washington's portrayal of the eponymous Eli, though his facial features were more inspired by rapper Common.

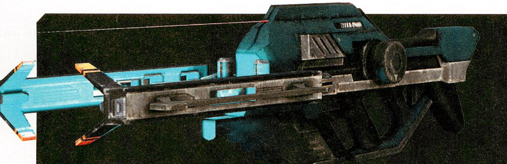
Clint Eastwood
Eastwood's portrayals of nearly every memorable Western badass in cinema history shaped Emmett's gritty (space) cowboy attitude, framing him as the classic morally ambiguous hero.

Solid Snake
Like Solid Snake, Emmett is destined to destroy his brother, the leader of a ruthless band of outcasts. Don't worry, that's not a spoiler—the writers wanted a personal story, not a dramatic twist.

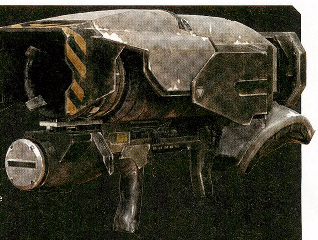
Foremen
With the ability to drop self-constructing buildings from space, Emmett is the most efficient foreman ever... although most foremen don't also carry assault rifles and fly spacefaring warplanes.

GEAR UP

From weapons to vehicles to Build & Battle structures, the gear makes the man. Here's a look at just a few of the items we'll be seeing on the battlefield.



LR-3 Railgun Equipped with a long-range scope, fires a higher-caliber version of the Kinetic Rifle round.



M.A.W. Rocket Launcher
Functionally equivalent to the *Warhawk* Rocket Launcher, hold to lock on or tap to dumb-fire.

Razorback A sturdy 4x4 that carries up to three players and comes with a mounted gun on the back.

Vulture Jetpack An amazingly versatile "go anywhere" answer for the standard Rifter or Outcast ground troop.

Hawk A transforming mech that can instantaneously change into a flying jet.

kind of protagonist the developers wanted. "I think the kind of Western we're trying to approach is not the Western where we want our main character to be a white-hat good guy," continues DeVore. "We want our character to be that gray kind of in-between. We knew that we wanted to push a hero character that was not just your super-buff space marine soldier."

Tall Tales

This focus on moral ambiguity extends not only to Emmett's character but to the actual plot as well. When Emmett's old hometown (which had previously shunned him) is attacked by an unusually well-organized band of Outcasts, the mayor implores Emmett to rescue the local mining operation, promising him healthy compensation for his assistance. So Emmett returns and quickly discovers why these particular Outcasts have evolved into such a sophisticated threat: they're being led by Emmett's fully mutated Outcast brother. "It's a very Western theme that it's a battle of two brothers on two different sides," notes DeVore. "It's something we wanted to play with because it makes that overall conflict more personal."

Between Emmett's Civil War-style fraternal conflict and the game's decidedly Wild West aesthetic—complete with dusty towns, hip holsters, and old-timey prospectors—*Starhawk's* storyline seems poised to fully capture that frontier spirit in spite of its far-flung setting. "The story itself, we made a very conscious effort to tell a small, intimate story in a small portion of a solar system," details DeVore. "We knew we wanted a sci-fi game but we didn't want the game to come across as overreaching into this epic, all across the universe kind of story. We wanted it to have this desolate, very edge of the frontier feeling to it."

Though the campaign is ultimately a prelude to multiplayer, the team clearly feels strongly about the strength of the overall experience. "I want it to be paced out right and I want it to have the right duration so that players feel really bonded with the game at the end of it," expresses Jobe. "I want players to put it in and have no experiential speed bumps and just go mission to mission—maybe one hot, sweaty, big, long gamer session—and think, 'That was awesome. I finished it, and it was great. This game has hundreds of hours of multiplayer. I can't wait to go online.'"

The Lawless Net

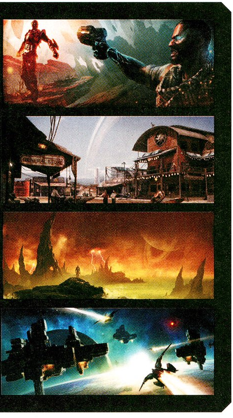
Online, after all, is where the action really happens, as multiplayer is definitely "*Starhawk's* focus," according to Jobe. It makes perfect sense considering that *Warhawk* was a multiplayer-only title, and, like *Warhawk*, up to 32 players can challenge each other in standard Capture the Flag,

> "STARHAWK'S STORYLINE SEEMS POISED TO CAPTURE THAT FRONTIER SPIRIT."

Starhawk also features a cooperative horde mode that retains the core Build & Battle system.

THE ENDLESS ART WALL

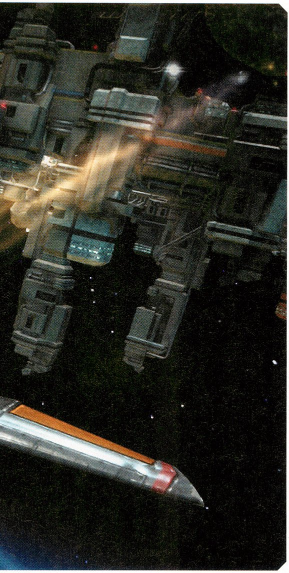
In order to bring you this story, the intrepid PTOM reporter traveled all the way to LightBox Interactive's home offices in Austin, Texas, where we discovered not only a hardworking team of committed developers but also a giant art-covered wall that literally ran the entire length of the studio. Feet and yards and *miles* of *Starhawk* art. Naturally, we enlisted creative director **Lars DeVore** to handpick a few choice pieces to share here.

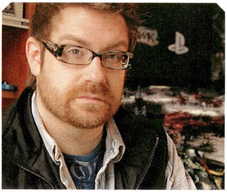


According to Jobe, the length of the campaign is "right on par" with other shooters.

Team Deathmatch, and Domination modes across a variety of environments. Naturally, the same Build & Battle-fueled gameplay from single-player carries directly over into the multiplayer. Hawks and tanks, rifles and rocket launchers, bunkers and turrets—every weapon and strategy still applies...but with a few carefully implemented limitations.

For example, players' Build & Battle options in single-player are largely determined by the mission at hand. In multiplayer,





HAWK TALK

LightBox president **Dylan Jobe** lays down the basics for Starhawk multiplayer success, and we add a few tricks of our own

Don't overuse Build & Battle
"When we first released the [private] beta, everyone was like, 'Oh yeah! Build & Battle!' and they were just building sh-t everywhere and they were losing sight of the fact that this is a competitive game. So be smart."

Be aware of flow-lines
"If the road is going that way, don't build your garage pointing this way. That's not smart. Build your garage pointing that way so if you need to do a flag run, you can just run out of your base, hop in a Razorback, and take off."

Play offense and defense
"You'd be surprised by how often everyone just kind of wolf packs the enemy base and the flag. If you don't have people staying back on defense to build structures or repair things, you're not helping your team at all."

Adjust tactics on the fly
"If you're on the ground and you're finding, 'Oh my god, they've built a base that I simply can't get into on the ground.' Don't. This is *Starhawk*. Build a launch pad, build yourself an aircraft, and bomb the sh-t out of it."

PTOM does not condone being a dick when playing online. That being said, here are a few clever ways to mess with your friends.

The walls are closing in
Wall placements can be upgraded into gates that automatically lower for allies and friendly vehicles, so if you build a wall directly in front of an enemy gate, they'll only have a split-second to react before careening into your blockade.

Where'd that come from?
Rather than exploding instantly, proximity mines automatically attach themselves to any enemy vehicle that gets near. So instead of placing mines on the ground and waiting for an enemy to pass by, try throwing them on the wings of a Hawk then buzzing the enemy base. Bring the mines directly to them!

Debunked
Bunkers are a great defensive resource. The front door only opens for allies, and while those inside can shoot out, no gunfire can get in. There is, however, a hatch on top that makes the structure vulnerable to infiltration. If you're feeling stealthy, sneak in the hatch and plant a mine above the door.

Build & Battle bomb run
You don't have to be on foot to create a structure using Build & Battle. Hovering in a jetpack, riding shotgun in a jeep, soaring in a Hawk—any time's a good time to build. Try flying over an enemy base and quickly building a turret as you pass.

rather than giving access to every single Build & Battle component at once, players must choose a preset loadout palette with a specific set of options. "You can pick a general combat loadout, which might give you beam turrets and Hawks and jet packs and bunkers and outposts and some of these parts," suggests Jobe. "Or you may want to be all focused on air combat, so you get launch pads and anti-air turrets but none of the big ground vehicles. Or you can pick ones with mostly troop combat and no vehicles."

Clearly players will enjoy a wealth of options, but why limit the choices at all? "As much flexibility as we give the player—which is a ton—we want to make sure it's always balanced. We don't want to have a degenerate system where there are Build & Battle parts in the roster that don't have proper counters, and that's why we want to have control over that," explains Jobe. Take the beam turret, for instance. This handy device will automatically attack any enemy Hawk that soars overhead, making it a an effective defensive tool. But it also has a weakpoint: a blinking red light that a sniper can easily shot to disable the entire unit.

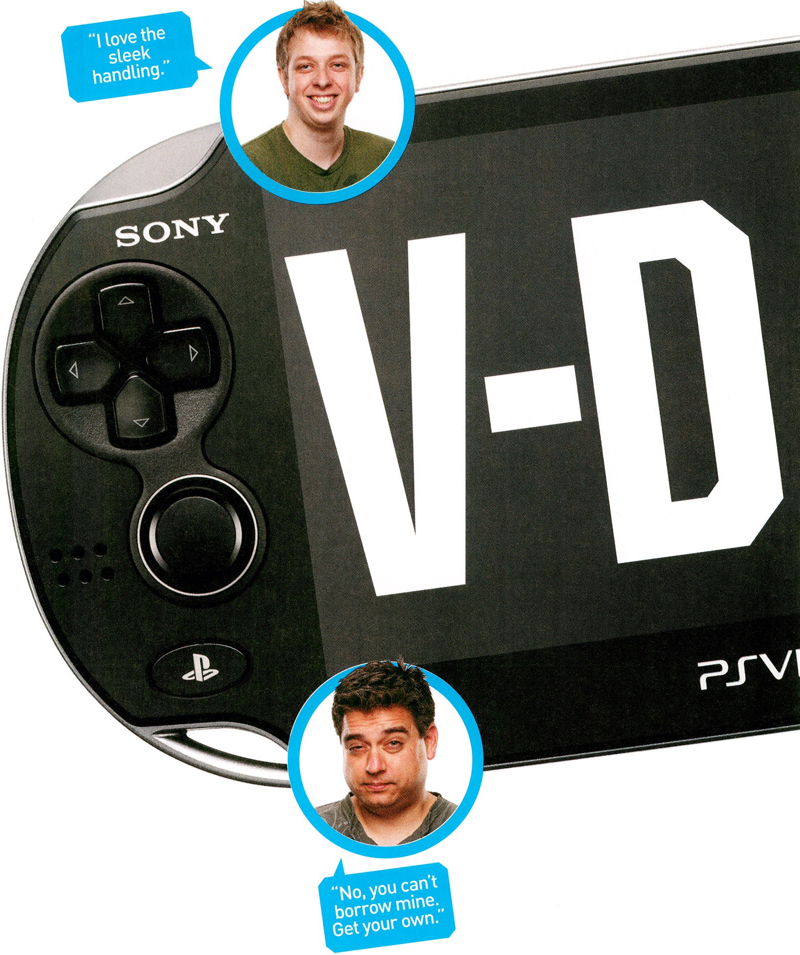
Fair and Square

By keeping the action balanced, the developers hope to make every strategy a potentially effective approach, allowing players to enjoy the game in any way they see fit. "We don't have individual classes per se. We have so many mechanics available to the player—from the Build & Battle situation or from being able to play on foot or being a vehicle person—that people are almost falling into their own little personal class, whatever they like," says DeVore. "You can play it in enough different ways that, round to round, it feels like a different game."

Want to be a tank specialist? Great. Want to hang back and defend the base? Totally doable. Just remember: In *Starhawk*, teamwork is key. "If everyone plays lone wolf, it ends up becoming a totally different game and one that does not carry the same qualities as when the squads are actually working together, and I think when you layer the strategic elements of Build & Battle on top of that, you really want to try to pull out as much cooperation as possible," advises DeVore. Players won't simply have to rely on their teammates' will to win to ensure cooperation, however. The developers have made sure to award experience points for absolutely any action that benefits the team, from flag defense to building useful structures.

Once players have accumulated enough XP, they can begin to purchase Skills and deepen their commitment to their chosen role on the battlefield. But don't worry, the team at LightBox plans to preserve the "sport" of the multiplayer as best they can. "We made a very concerted effort to stay true to the way *Warhawk* worked, which was that the advantages of a player are only based on that player's skill," remarks DeVore. "It is not based on any tweaks or buffs or anything that we've sold them through XP. It's only based on the skill that they have, so [the Skills are] only small adjustments that will allow you to do different things. They're nothing that should allow you to be able to tip your skill level significantly."

Regardless of how much impact Skills eventually have on the larger game, we'll always be able to drop a launch pad from the sky, hop in the cockpit of a mech, and stomp a few of our friends before soaring off into space like a cowboy riding off into the sunset. It seems only fitting.


"I love the sleek handling."
SONY
V-D
PSVI
"No, you can't borrow mine. Get your own."

"The tiny memory card is adorable!"
AY
SELECT
START
TA
"My thumbs love the dual analog sticks!"

February 22, 2012. The day the most powerful handheld system ever created arrives. Get the jump on the next dimension of portable gaming with PTOM's essential **PlayStation Vita Launch Guide.**

The Day One Line Up

PS Vita boasts a launch lineup of 26 games. Here's the complete list:

- Army Corps of Hell
- Asphalt Injection
- Ben 10: Galactic Racing
- BlazBlue: Continuum Shift EXTEND
- Dungeon Hunter Alliance
- Dynasty Warriors Next
- Escape Plan
- F1 2011
- FIFA Soccer
- Hot Shots Golf: World Invitational
- Hustle Kings
- Little Deviants
- Lumines Electronic Symphony
- Michael Jackson: The Experience
- ModNation Racers: Road Trip
- Ninja Gaiden Σ Plus
- Plants vs. Zombies
- Rayman Origins
- Shinobido 2: Revenge of Zen
- Super StarDust Delta
- Tales of Space: Mutant Blobs
- Touch My Katamari
- Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3
- Uncharted: Golden Abyss
- Virtua Tennis 4: World Tour Edition
- Wipeout 2048

Coming Soon

PS Vita titles that won't make launch day but will be arriving shortly

- Disgaea 3: Absence of Detention
- Gravity Rush
- LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5–7
- MLB 12: The Show
- Reality Fighters
- Ridge Racer
- Silent Hill: Book of Memories
- Supremacy MMA: Unrestricted
- Unit 13

The Big Decision

Wi-Fi or Wi-Fi+3G? Which Vita is right for you?

SONY
PS Store
near
5
SELECT
START
PSVITA

Wi-Fi

Price: $249.99

GET IT:

1. If online connectivity isn't a huge priority for you.
2. If you're confident you'll have consistent access to Wi-Fi.
3. If you'd rather use that $50 saving to pick up an additional Vita game.

Wi-Fi+3G

Price: $299.99

GET IT:

1. If you need constant Internet access when you're out and about.
2. If you want to take full advantage of Vita's social gaming features.
3. If you don't mind paying $15 or $25 a month for the AT&T 3G Data Plan.

3G Data Plan

Service Provider AT&T
Terms Month-to-month
(no long-term contract)

250MB | $14.99/month

2GB | $25/month

Perks: Vita owners with an AT&T data plan receive free access to over 29,000 AT&T Wi-Fi hotspots nationwide. Plus, you receive one free game download from a select list upon activation of a data plan.

Our recommendation:
Start with the 250MB plan for the first month and see if it fulfills your usage needs. Since there's no contract and the plan selection can easily be modified through the Vita unit, it's a simple matter to upgrade later if you need the additional data bandwidth.

Don't Forget Memory

PS Vita lacks on-board memory, so a memory card is required to store downloaded games and media.

4GB | $19.99

8GB | $29.99

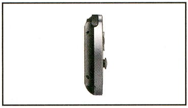
16GB | $59.99

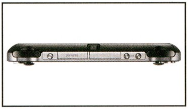
32GB | $99.99

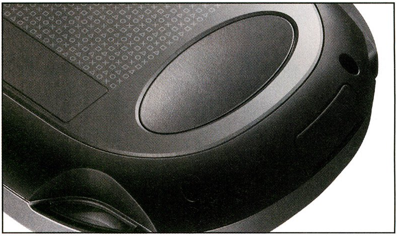
SONY
PSVITA
32GB

Our recommendation:
If money's no object, go nuts and pick up a 32GB card. But for the rest of us, it's hard to predict just how much memory will be enough to satisfy our personal level of usage. The $39.99 PS Vita Starter Kit is a good option as it includes a 4GB memory card along with a pocket pouch, protective film, card case, cleaning cloth, and headphones.

PS Vita Starter Kit
Price **$39.99**







We pick the first game we'll play (after Uncharted)

Scott

Sound Shapes

"For fans of music, rhythm games, and things that are awesome."

"Hit a few buttons to create a looping track? Simple and rewarding. Hit a few more to build a playable platforming level? Totally original and exciting. *Sound Shapes* combines the inherent satisfaction of a music-sequencing program with Sony's wildly successful Play Create Share mantra."

Roger

MLB 12: The Show

"I predict that the San Francisco Giants will go 162-0 this season."

"It's not a launch title, but *MLB 12: The Show* will be arriving in March. It's difficult to fit sports gaming into my hectic schedule these days, so a portable version of my favorite baseball franchise is just what I need. And Vita's super-sharp OLED screen means that I won't have a problem seeing the ball."

Ryan

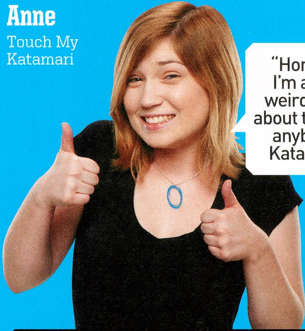
Gravity Rush

"Controlling gravity is simple thanks to Vita's motion sensing tech. Fear me!"

"Move over, Nathan Drake—there's a new star in town: *Gravity Rush's* Kat, a mysterious young woman with the ability to manipulate gravity. Sure, she isn't obsessed with treasure, but she's got a knack for walking on ceilings and kicking evil monsters right in their glowing, bulbous weak spots."

Anne

Touch My Katamari


"Honestly, I'm a little weirded out about touching anybody's Katamari."

"My love for the *Katamari* franchise burns with the fire of a thousand suns. The ridiculous characters, design, and premise had me hooked from the moment I put *Katamari Damacy* in my PS2. It's this nostalgia and the new Vita-specific game mechanics that have me psyched for *Touch My Katamari*."

What to Play?

The games to buy first based on gamer type

The No Brainer

The one Vita game every self-respecting gamer must play

UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS

Easily the best reason we've seen to pony up for a Vita on day one. While the touchscreen platforming is surprisingly unobtrusive and firefights remain as robust as in the PS3 games, these aren't what really impress. No, most of all it's the minor technical miracle of holding a game in your hands that looks every bit as good as the original *Uncharted*. Indeed, the action on the OLED screen is so dang purdy, it's not far behind playing *Drake's Deception* on a really good plasma TV.

Action Adventure fans

Visit the sights, stop for the fights

GRAVITY RUSH
NINJA GAIDEN Σ PLUS
UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS

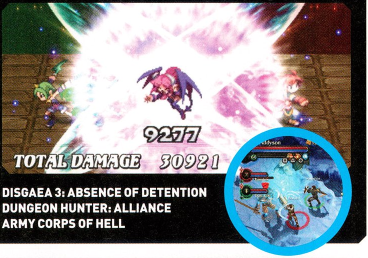
Shooter fans

Happiness is being trigger-happy

UNIT 13
SUPER STARDUST DELTA
SILENT HILL: BOOK OF MEMORIES

RPG fans

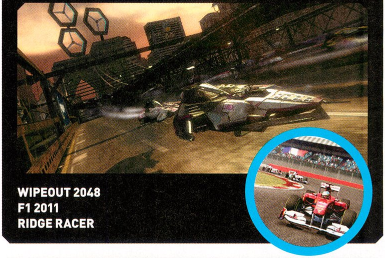
Always looking to get back to the grind



DISGAEA 3: ABSENCE OF DETENTION
DUNGEON HUNTER: ALLIANCE
ARMY CORPS OF HELL

Racing fans

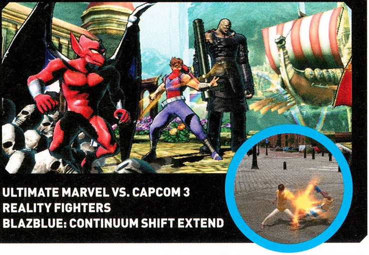
Perfect for speed demons and car freaks



WIPEOUT 2048
F1 2011
RIDGE RACER

Fighting fans

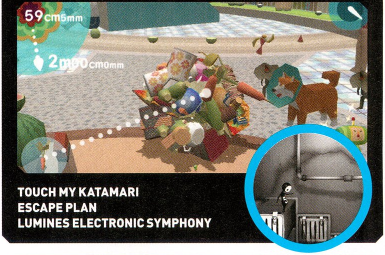
Looking to let fists and feet do the talking



ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3
REALITY FIGHTERS
BLAZBLUE: CONTINUUM SHIFT EXTEND

Indie-style fans

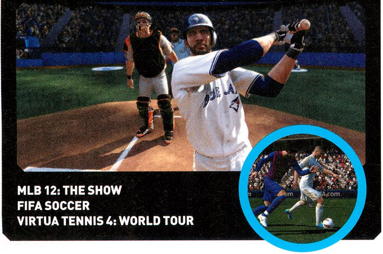
Seeking quirky, cute, and compelling



TOUCH MY KATAMARI
ESCAPE PLAN
LUMINES ELECTRONIC SYMPHONY

Sports fans

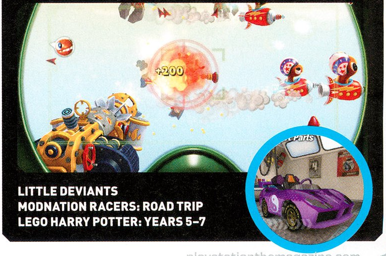
Refers to a team of millionaires as "us"



MLB 12: THE SHOW
FIFA SOCCER
VIRTUA TENNIS 4: WORLD TOUR

Kids

Because they *will* borrow your Vita



LITTLE DEVIANTS
MODNATION RACERS: ROAD TRIP
LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 5–7

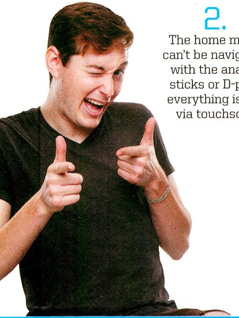
Vita Essentials

20 things to know about your new best friend

1.

It's not just another PSP

So long, fiddly nub of despair! Vita comes armed with dual-analog sticks and is powered by an ARM Cortex-A9 quad-core processor. For those who don't speak fluent tech, this equates to huge processing power in your palms—more than double that of an iPhone 4S. Games-wise, it means highly detailed environments and graphics never seen on a portable until now.



2.

The home menu can't be navigated with the analog sticks or D-pad–everything is done via touchscreen.

3. Notifications

like the last Trophy you unlocked can be accessed via the bubble in the top right-hand corner of the screen.

4. Beat Cred

The Trophies section can be used to check both your PS3- and Vita-acquired digital awards.

5. Page Turner

Swipe the corner of apps to close them. Move your finger slowly and the paper-esque background will bend and fold accordingly.

6. Take a screenshot by simultaneously pressing the Start and PS buttons.

7.

Vita and its built-in mic can be used to make a rudimentary music track from sounds made with your mouth or from anywhere really...

8.

Tap That!

Double-tapping the PS button can change the way the menus look and also check the applications that are open.

9.

Vita can be charged via a PC/Mac USB connection, but it takes longer than using the standard plug-in charger.

10. It can hook up to both PS3 and PSN

So long, faithful XMB. You've served us well. The new LiveArea is now the hub, and from here you can access far more of PSN than ever before. You can also play multiplayer with PS3 friends, provided you're playing a compatible game (*Wipeout 2048* is the first game to support this feature).

Vital Accessories

Separating the "must haves" from the "maybe laters"

In-Ear Headset

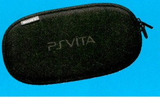
Price $19.99
Headphones or earbuds are a portable gaming necessity, but who doesn't already own one? **Maybe Later**

Carrying Case

Price $19.99
Protection for your costly new piece of tech is always smart, but this case design doesn't thrill us. **Maybe Later**

Travel Pouch

Price $19.99
Simple and functional, the fully enclosed design is an improvement over the Carrying Case. But we're particular about case design so... **Maybe Later**



Protective Film (2 pack)

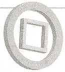
Price $9.99
We always recommended protecting the screens on gadgets, and we always end up buying screen film anyway. **Must Have**

Card Case

Price $5.99
Card cases aren't a bad idea, but we prefer carrying cases that offer this functionality–it's just one less thing we might lose. **Maybe Later**

11. It still plays downloaded PSP games.

Any PSP titles you've downloaded from PSN will be yours again when you activate Vita with your account, and you can even copy over those vital *Patapon* saves via your PS3. To store data, you'll need a memory card.



12.

There are 1,638 X, Triangle, Square, and Circle icons on the rear touchpad.

13. Sounds like Victory

When you unlock a Trophy you'll be greeted by the same "ting" sound as on PS3.

14. Room to Move.

Hold your finger on the screen for a couple of seconds and Vita allows you to move icons to different places—just like on iPhone/iPad. Up to 10 separate "pages" (that accommodate up to 10 icons each) can be created.

15. UMD RIP

Games are now either downloaded from PSN or purchased on physical Vita cards. These hold up to 4GB of data—more than double a UMD's capacity—so expect bigger, more detailed games. *Uncharted* sits at almost that size, so it's good to know that a speedy 'net connection isn't needed to get your hands on the newest titles. And admit it, you secretly love having the box, you dinosaur. Game saves can also be held on the Vita card, so you won't be clogging up the memory.

16. Battery life saved means more time for gaming.

Vita's power-save default setting (the idle time until it slips into standby mode) is one minute. Optional settings are three- or five-minutes.

17. Mood Swings

There are 23 default colors that can be used for menu backgrounds. You can also select pictures that you've taken on Vita as your backdrop.

18.

Game manuals are installed on the Vita card, which you can click on right after selecting the title of your choice.

19. Learn and Earn

You can earn Trophies for completing the tutorial minigames in Welcome Park.

20.

Each title has a bespoke game screen that contains links to the official website of the game and, in some cases, a direct link to the PlayStation Store so you can purchase DLC.

Cradle

Price $19.99
It's not really a necessity, but the Cradle is just so sexy and convenient! And what better way to show off your Vita to co-workers and friends. **Must Have**

Portable Charger

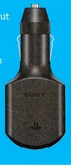
Price $49.99
Yes, the Vita's a bit power hungry, but 50 bucks is a bit pricey for some extended battery power. **Maybe Later**

AC Adaptor

Price $14.99
The Vita comes with one, so you won't need this unless you've lost the original or an extra. **Maybe Later**

Car Adaptor

Price $14.99
Recharging while we're out and about in our car is a near necessity for us, so unless you happen to have a USB compatible charger already... **Must Have**



USB Cable

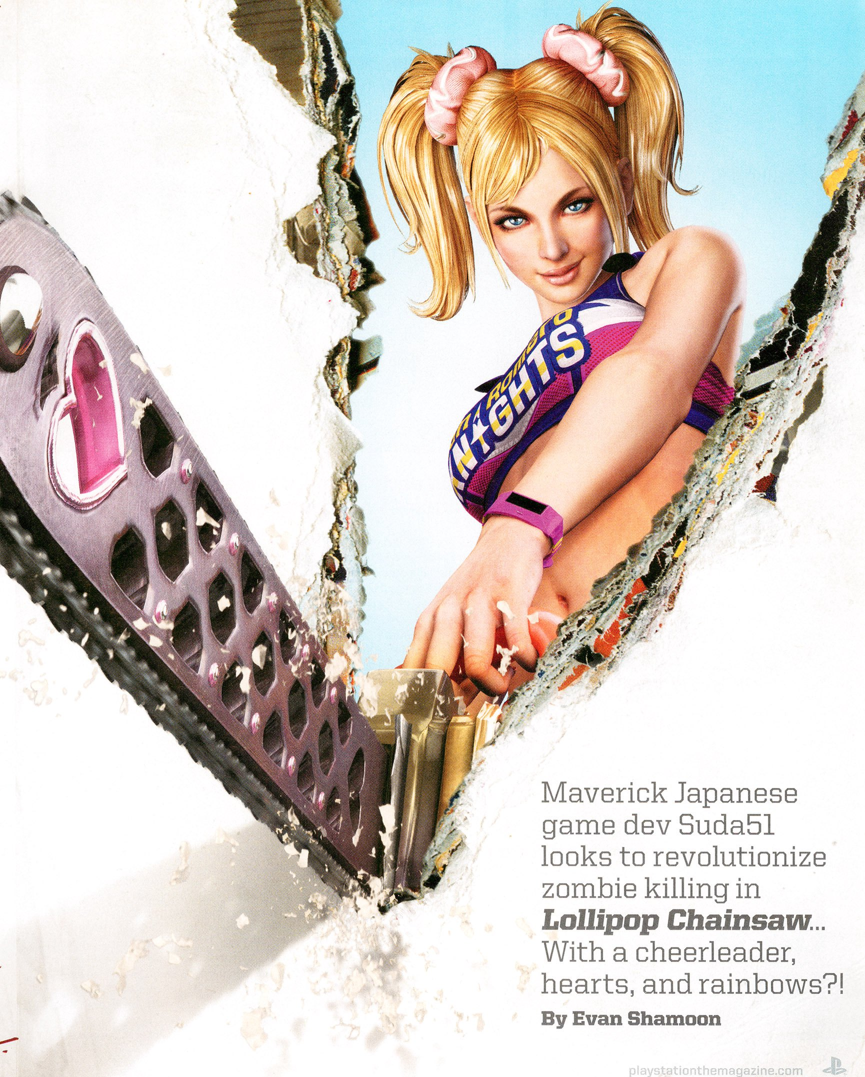
Price $14.99
We always seem to misplace our cables, so we'll probably being ponying up for one of these eventually. But for now... **Maybe Later**

GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE...

(DUH, CHAINSAWS!!!)

XOXOXOXO

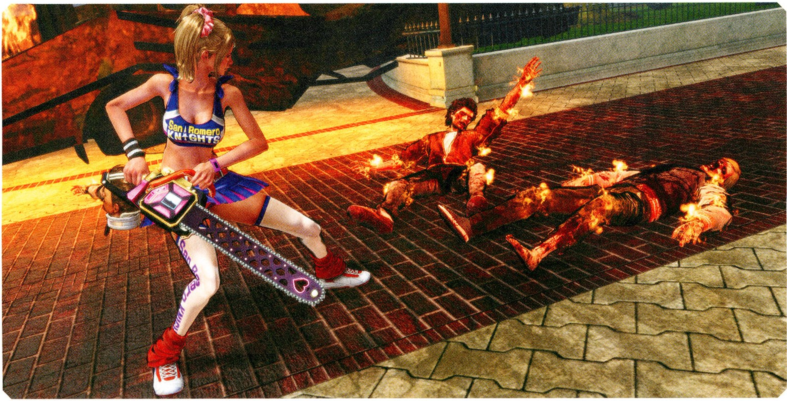
Juliet



Maverick Japanese game dev Suda51 looks to revolutionize zombie killing in ***Lollipop Chainsaw***... With a cheerleader, hearts, and rainbows?!

By Evan Shamoon

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2012** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **Grasshopper Manufacture**



Even at this early stage, it's clear *Chainsaw* has the "crazy" knob ramped to eleven.

Consider *Lollipop Chainsaw* a collaboration between cult favorites. Developed by Suda51's Grasshopper Manufacture—a Japanese studio known for its rather "eccentric" sensibilities (*Killer7*, *No More Heroes*, and most recently *Shadows of the Damned*)—and scripted from Suda's original concept and outline by writer/director James Gunn (2004's *Dawn of the Dead* remake, *Tromeo and Juliet*, *Slither*), the game is far from ordinary. If there are two words that can sum up the game, we suggest: "rainbows" and "blood." Even at this early stage, it's clear that *Chainsaw* has the "crazy" knob ramped to eleven. "I wanted to make a female zombie hunter that uses a chainsaw," says Suda51 of the game's initial concept. And he has done just that.

Quick recap: *Lollipop Chainsaw* is the story of teenage cheerleader Juliet Starling and her attempts to fight off an invasion of zombies in her hometown of San Romero. (Two quick bits of info about Juliet: zombie hunters raised her, and lollipops are her favorite food.) When zombies take over San Romero High, she takes center stage, accompanied by her high school crush Nick, whose severed head dangles from her waist (and occasionally "finds its feet" and fights alongside her [see sidebar]). "Panic in a school, a popular girl in school, and a zombie game set in a world heavily influenced by pop culture were all mixed together to form the base of this game," says Suda. "I wanted to create a character who can supersede the typical persona of a video heroine." And just *where* did those ideas come from? "Of course, I took inspiration when I thought of ideas in the bathroom," says the typically oddball Suda. "With the spray nozzle, the ideas came to me." And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how you make a videogame.

After somewhat disappointing sales of Grasshopper's last game, the EA-published *Shadows of the Damned*, the developer's central goal was to create a game that would strongly appeal to an American audience. This meant finding a writer who could help translate Suda's rather left-field ideas without losing their essential madness, deftly navigating cultural touchstones, and disparities. The developer's first choice was George A. Romero, famed creator of the original *Dawn of the Dead* and *Night of the Living Dead*. Romero, however, wasn't available. When Warner Bros. Interactive producer Scott Warr suggested James Gunn as an alternative, he wasn't sure how Suda would react. "Not only did he know who he was, he had seen his movies and was a fan of his work," says Warr. "He was way into it." Thus began what has become a fruitful working relationship, which has taken place mostly over video chat to account for the distance between Tokyo and Gunn's residence in Los Angeles.

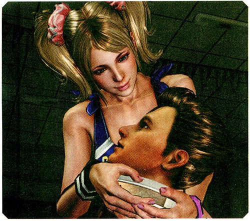
Sweet Carnage

The game plays as an off-the-wall third-person brawler might be expected: lots of rapid-fire button combos, but with something of a twist. Here, said twist comes partially in the form of two pom-poms, which are perfectly suited for gathering enemies together for the inevitably grisly death-by-chainsaw. Bonus points are scored for, say, taking off multiple heads in one fell swoop, so the game becomes very much about lining up targets and dispatching of them in stylish fashion. "I'd like [players] to experience the great feeling of using both a chainsaw and cheerleading action, as well as our passion for this fun zombie game," says Suda. "On top of that, I'd like the players to see how up-beat and energetic Juliet is, no matter what. Her attitude is meant to engulf the player with a positive vibe." The developer has responded to a feeling amongst fans that *Shadows of the Damned's* controls were generally "too loose," and has therefore spent considerable time ramping up the sensitivity (without overdoing it, they note).

Our playtest takes us through the game's

SANROMERO
special Seminar

▲ Only Suda51 could devise a game in which a chainsaw-wielding cheerleader dates a bodiless man.



Love Never Dies

Can true love survive zombie hordes?

"Zombies appear in San Romero High and a cheerleader zombie hunter works hard to destroy them," says Suda51, summing up the easiest takeaways from *Lollipop Chainsaw*. "At first look, the game may appear theatrical, but the underlying theme of the story is 'love.' Wrapped in the zombie action game, love between Nick and Juliet, and the love amongst Juliet's family are woven into the story. I'd love everyone to make it to the last scene to watch it!"

Juliet, who Suda calls "an active girl, but very popular in school," is quite enjoying life as a high school cheerleader. We watch in a cutscene as her boyfriend, Nick, almost becomes a zombie; before the zombie poison circulates through his entire body, however, Juliet cuts off his head and lays down a little magical juju to save him (and by "save," of course, we mean go through the rest of his life without everything from the neck down). So he's strapped to Juliet's waist, and comes along for the ride. "He helps Juliet during battles as he can be attached to the headless zombies to use the zombie's ability," says Suda. "Also, he is a key person in the story. I hope you enjoy the dialogue and story between Juliet and Nick." Something tells us we will.

▲ Hello Mr. Zombie. How about a rip-roaring chainsaw to the naughty bits?

early moments, beginning at the entrance to San Romero High (clearly named after the aforementioned George A. Romero, despite his absence from the credits). As we move through the high school's zombie-infested hallways, it becomes clear that Juliet's skills as a cheerleader are surprisingly practical when it comes to zombie killing. Smushing zombies together is fluid and effective, while attacks string together jump kicks, machine-gun stabs of the chainsaw, and various other acrobatics to glorious effect. Finishing moves consist of a variety of ways to skin a cat (in this case, behead a zombie), several of which end in geysers and waterfalls of blood. The whole thing is bathed in bright, saturated Technicolor, with sparkly displays of pyrotechnics and various visual effects pouring forth from Juliet as she fights. "I'm gonna need another tampon," Juliet sighs after one particularly bloody zombie encounter.

Under the Influence

In the flesh, *Lollipop* feels equal parts *Breakfast Club*, *Army of Darkness*, and *Bayonetta*, all with a sugary-sweet candy coating. It's every bit as violent and campy as Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers*, with tongue planted firmly in cheek throughout. At one point we make our way into the school gym, complete with several zombies chugging away on treadmills (as well as a giant mirror that covers the entire wall, reflecting the

action for posterity). "Running zombies! How stupid is that?" cries out Nick's severed head upon surveying the scene—a reference to the fan outcry that came as a response to the rather nimble zombies in Gunn's own *Dawn of the Dead* remake.

In case it wasn't obvious, the "in-joke-per-minute" ratio in *Chainsaw* is off the charts. "The mixture of splatter and pop-art style is the biggest attraction of *Lollipop Chainsaw*," says Suda. He notes that while many of the game's characters began visually, several were developed out of music genres; Zed, one of the enemy bosses, was an outgrowth of Suda's conception of punk rock. "By the way, the first thing we've purchased for our reference was the replica chainsaw model from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, a horror movie," he says. "This game is influenced by American culture as well as their pop music."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Lollipop Chainsaw*

▲ Not only has Juliet received a supernatural zombie-slayin' chainsaw, she's also a trained martial artist. Talk about girl power.

very much wears its essential videogame-ness on its sleeve. In addition to zombie hordes, we go head-to-head with a rather frightening schoolteacher-turned-zombie who serves as one of the game's many sub-bosses. There are shops littered around the school where we can purchase various upgrades and tchotchkes, some for enhanced powers and some merely for posterity (Warner Bros. isn't saying yet whether there will be alternatives to the chainsaw as the main weapon). In what may be one of the game's biggest throwbacks, a meter that's filled by collecting stars makes us temporarily invincible. "She is a zombie hunter recognized by a divine existence. She has gone through a tough training series and as recognition of her learning to be a zombie hunter, supernatural power was delivered to a chainsaw in her house and it was given to her as her weapon," explains Suda. "She is also a trained martial artist. With her abilities as a cheerleader, she has created her own danceable martial art with a unique rhythm. Her fighting combines all of that with the destructive and cutting power of her chainsaw."

Oh, and how about one more cult favorite to round things out? Warner Bros. has revealed that Akira Yamaoka, whose resume includes such classics as Konami's *Silent Hill* and Grasshopper's own *No More Heroes 2*, will be working on the game's soundtrack (though it hasn't made it into the preview builds yet). His typically moody, ambient style will be shelved in favor of the peppy bubblegum pop that characterizes *Lollipop Chainsaw*.

Strange Invaders

While the question of whether or not the game will hit big in the U.S. remains to be seen, Warr and the group at Warner Bros. Interactive are confident that the appropriate steps have been taken. Arguably the biggest factor is the dev team's access to WB's team of testers, who provide ongoing feedback on everything from the mechanical feel of the controls to the comedic success of the jokes. "James has American slang down, which is something that's been really helpful for Suda," says Warr. "When [Suda] has a joke that he's trying to translate into English, James is great at making it hit while still preserving the original idea."

While it's not being discussed just yet, the developer assures us that the game will include some online features; we can only hope that this means co-op, with one player possibly controlling Nick's head. But what separates this from the unending army of undead we've seen over the last five years? "We have not seen a light and fun zombie game," says Suda. "*Lollipop Chainsaw* is the only zombie game that offers hearts and rainbows! Relax, and enjoy while you have some popcorn."

"The mixture of splatter and pop-art style is the biggest attraction of *Lollipop Chainsaw*." –Suda51

Cultural Exchange

Suda 51 on bringing in the big Gunn

"Because he is the master of zombie," says Suda of the decision to bring writer/director James Gunn into the mix for *Lollipop Chainsaw*. "Based on the scenario written by Grasshopper staff members, James re-wrote, and re-directed them. [He] provided us with precise feedback based on his method of creating drama, and with his famed writing style, the story has become very fun and attractive." The Japanese version was then written to reflect Gunn's re-write, making for a fair bit of cultural back-and-forth. "But we also converted his unique sense of humor into our own language," Suda assures us.

As for how it was working with a fairly big name from the American film industry? "It's an interesting experience," says Suda. "This collaboration has already provided a result far exceeding our expectations. I'd always like to work with people like him who love videogames. New videogame experience is definitely essential, and delivered."

FIGHT!

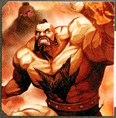
Who are the Street Fighter X Tekken tag team champions?

Forget Brock Lesnar going to UFC. *This* is the fighting crossover we've been waiting for since we first learned to clench a fist. *Street Fighter X Tekken* arrives in March, and it features the most famous faces from the world's biggest fighters. Consider it round one. Namco's reply—*Tekken X Street Fighter*—is currently in development. To put the game through its paces we arranged a hands-on tournament to separate the jaw-breakers from the shin-kickers. And because Capcom's Yoshinori Ono and Namco's Katsuhiro Harada have spent the past year Twitter-baiting in mock hatred, it seems appropriate to pit Team Capcom against Team Namco. Enough talk—let's get it on!

★ CONTENDERS, READY! ★

Meet the gruesome twosomes battling it out for the doubles gold

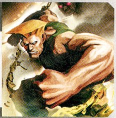
STREET FIGHTER

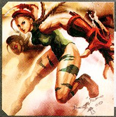


The Cold Warriors

Zangief and Guile

Putting those Cold War ill-feelings aside, the Red Cyclone and the Blond Toilet Brush are now working together, united by a love of impractical haircuts and things that spin around to cause bruises.

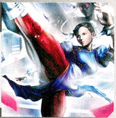


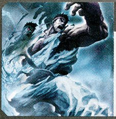


Thigh Expectations

Cammy and Chun-Li

Does this really need explaining? It's the stuff of failed cosplay and scandalous slash-fiction. Not teaming up these femme fatales would violate a massive number of man-laws.

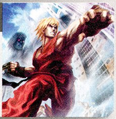


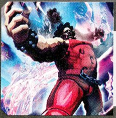


Team Gouken

Ryu and Ken

The differences between Gouken's disciples may now be more pronounced, but they still belong together like fist and face. It's not very imaginative, but "original" is for modern artists.

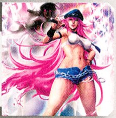




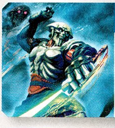
The Final Fighters

Hugo and Poison

You really don't want to know why these are paired up. Hardbodied she-male(?) and permed 'roid rager: a logistical nightmare. Just rest assured that someone online has written something far worse.



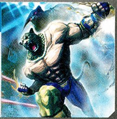
TEKKEN

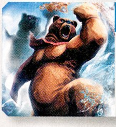


Mask Crusaders

Yoshimitsu and King

These probably-uglies have two things in common: They've been in the *Tekken* series since the very beginning, and nobody has any idea what they actually look like. Reason enough to pair them up.

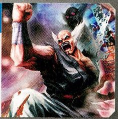


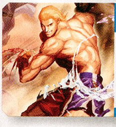


Bear Business

Kuma and Heihachi

You're the all-powerful head of a multi-million-dollar company, so what bodyguard do you choose? A special forces expert? A martial arts champ? No, a *dancing bear*. Frankly, they deserve each other.

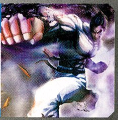


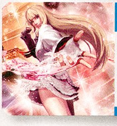


Fox Cunning

Steve and Kazuya

Kazuya has trouble finding a partner due to his tiresome habit of attempted patricide. Enter Steve Fox, who's apparently forgotten that his entire reason for existence is to destroy the Mishima Zaibatsu.

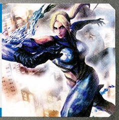




Team Peroxide

Lili and Nina

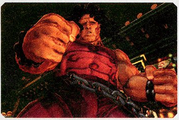
Strictly speaking, Nina should team up with son Steve, but he's going through that difficult phase where being seen with his mom is "uncool." Enter Lili, an equally blond and dangerous partner.

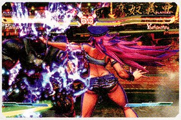


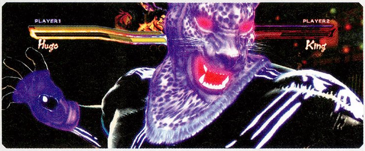
★ QUARTER-FINALS ★

Who's out in the first round of eliminations?

Final Fighters VS Mask Crusaders







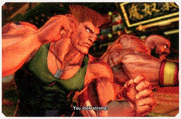
THE FIGHT

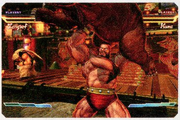
It's King vs. Hugo in the wrestling stakes, and Yoshi vs. Poison in the "what the hell are you?" stakes. And to be honest, the *Tekken* originals have the edge from the start—maybe because we actually know what we're doing with them. There's so much of Hugo to hit that the big man takes quite the pounding, and ol' Jag-Head and Ninj-Face have no qualms about putting their collective boots into their maybe-lady opponent.

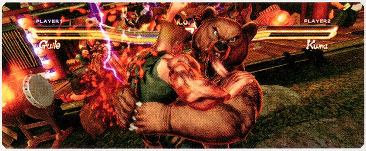
THE RESULT

When the Final Fight team start to pull it back, King sacrifices Yoshimitsu to activate Pandora Mode and DDTs Hugo for the victory. Winners: Mask Crusaders

Cold Warriors VS Bear Business







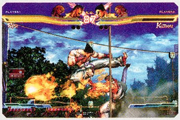
THE FIGHT

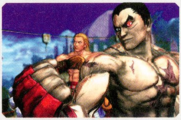
It's the question you've always asked about Zangief: Is he *actually* any good at punching bears? Turns out the answer is a humongous yes. He's also pretty tasty when it comes to body-slamming megalomaniac septuagenarians like Heihachi. Maybe it's years of *SF* muscle memory coming into play (or the fact a farty bear is an unfortunate choice for a tag partner) but Old Man Mishima and his ursine pal get battered, soaking up spinning piledrivers aplenty.

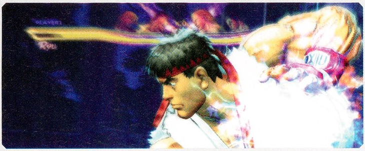
THE RESULT

Kuma manages one uncomfortably wet bear-cuddle before the end, but it's not enough. Guile and 'Gief go 1-0. Winners: Cold Warriors

Team Gouken VS Fox Cunning







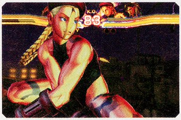
THE FIGHT

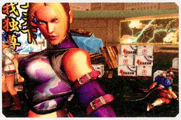
Kazuya only ended up with Steve because no one else would team up with the sneering middle-Mishima, and by the Devil Jin does it show. Ken and Ryu fill the screen with crisp fireballs and every attempt at jumping them is met with a thunderous Dragon Punch. It doesn't help that Kazuya's big special—which looks all shades of amazing when you nail it—is easier to read than a 200-foot, battle-metal playing, gunpowder-scented "BALLS!"

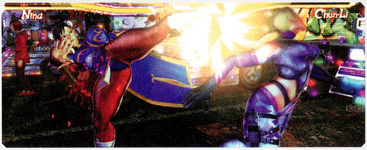
THE RESULT

Britain's premier pugilist barely gets the chance to lace up his gloves before it's all over—Ryu and Ken advance to the semis. Winners: Team Gouken

Thigh Expectations VS Team Peroxide







THE FIGHT

There's so much pretty in this match that it's almost disturbing, but it soon gets uglier than a stomped-on pork chop. Lili might look all rainbows and rose petals, but her corkscrew kicks do insane chip damage and the Capcom ladies struggle from the start. Our shapely heart-throbs are reduced to spamming Spiral Arrows and Kikokens, but Nina and Lili calmly dissect them. It's the biggest upset so far, in a number of ways.

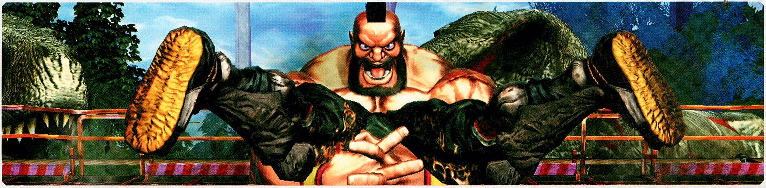
THE RESULT

Mega sadface. *SF's* first ladies are pummeled by a noob and the heroine of the worse-than-boil-lancing Death By Degrees. Winners: Team Peroxide

★ SEMI-FINALS ★

Things are hotting up faster than a flying fireball...

Cold Warriors VS Mask Crusaders



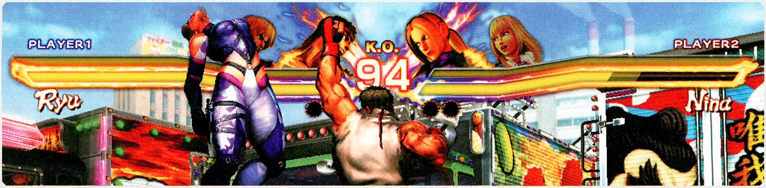
THE FIGHT

The first semi-final is more balanced than anything preceding it. At first Guile and Zangief look strong, with the Russian Cyclone nailing Spinning Piledrivers and Guile locking down the game with flash kicks and sonic booms. But before long, Team Stupid-Head responds with some slick tags, making use of Cross Rush combos and slapping down their opponents for the win.

THE RESULT

Two more classic *SF* heroes hit the deck. Winners: Mask Crusaders

Team Gouken VS Team Peroxide



THE FIGHT

Ryu and Ken dive into this with the aggression of enraged school bullies. The boys get unchivalrous with spammed Dragon Punches and that unpronounceable spin-o-kick, before hitting their Cross Assault special for a big finish. We expected something more honorable from Ryu, but obviously not Ken. *Never* trust a man with hair from another decade.

THE RESULT

It's a Capcom vs. Tekken final. We *swear* we didn't fix that. Winners: Team Gouken

★ LOSERS ★ Meet the teams that didn't make the cut

Round Two Fight

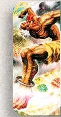
Rufus and Bob

The rotund karate masters would have made a formidable team if they hadn't stumbled across the catering tent before the fight. Instead, they settled for a cake-nomming contest. Brutal stuff.

The Legion of Dome

Sagat and Marduk

Joined by a common bond of baldness and accidental murders, these two probably would've torn through opponents. But, having realized the potential moral pitfalls, they chose to sit it out.



War and Peace

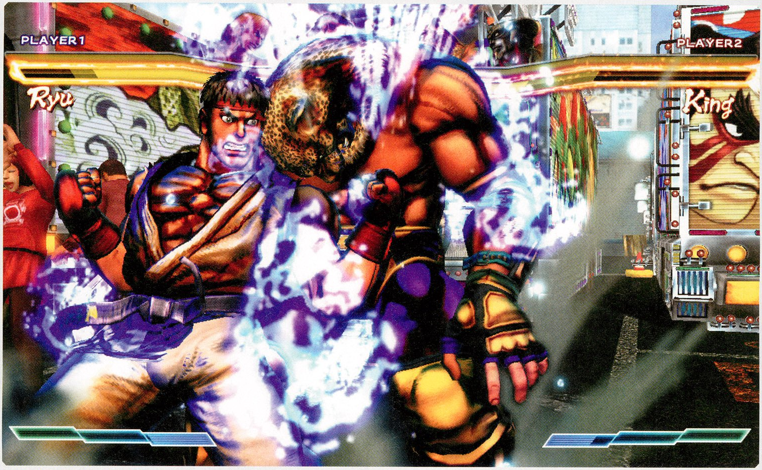
Dhalsim and Rolento

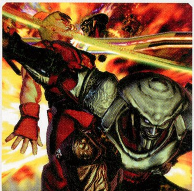
Rolento only needs one heart-to-heart with his spiritual advisor, Dhalsim, and he ditches bombs in favor of scented joss sticks. Which is all lovely, but useless for an effective fighting force.

★THE FINAL★

It's Capcom vs. Namco in the ultimate showdown

Team Gouken VS **Mask Crusaders**



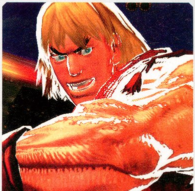


THE FIGHT

This is the big one, and it's in the hands of the series' originals. Both tag-teams have been in their respective franchises since the beginning, and by golly does it show. It's nervy, measured stuff to begin with, before the Hadoukens start flying and Yoshimitsu goes crazy with the blade. The masked *Tekken* boys initially work better with the tags, but Ryu and Ken have the edge in round one—their 2D credentials are clearer than King's bootprint on Ken's no-longer smiling face. Round 2 is closer, and a massive Cross Arts finish sees Yoshimitsu cutting through Ken, causing some worried mutterings from the Capcom hardcore. They shouldn't fret. Team Gouken come back strong for the final round, juggling their Namco rivals with Cross Rush combos that look *amazing*. Ryu's uppercut has rarely felt more bone-shattering. The two *Tekken* originals have nothing left up their 3D sleeves and it ends with a chip-damage whimper. That still counts!

THE RESULT

Ryu and Ken come through for Capcom, but we expect massive payback from King and Yoshi when *Tekken X Street Fighter* arrives. If Namco ever works out what to do with those pesky fireballs... Champions: Team Gouken



Pretty Kicks

Hwoarang and Julia

The prettiest tag team that isn't Cammy and Chun-Li, Hwoarang and Julia realized they had far too much to lose in terms of bone structure and unblemished skin. Why risk unsightly bruises?

Stealth Fighters

Ibuki and Raven

Years of training and dedication have made this pair a force of near-elemental power. Sadly, they've discovered something even more fun than beating up strangers: the best game of hide-and-seek *ever.*

French Electro

Abel and Cole

They sound like an overpriced veg-delivery service, but an amnesiac mercenary and sparky electro-hero would make a tough combo. Shame they had a cheese-hunt in New Marais instead.

10 GAMES YOU CAN PLATINUM IN UNDER 10 HOURS

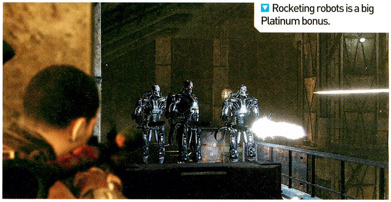
Boost your Trophy collection with these easy-to-beat challenges

Hardest Trophy
Veteran Commander – Complete the game (become a commander on Hard difficulty).
Time to Platinum
4-6 hours

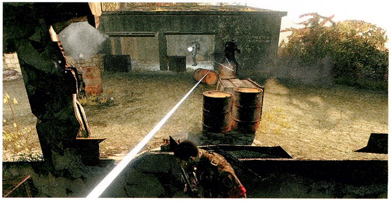
1

TERMINATOR SALVATION

The videogame version of McG's meh-tastic cyborg sequel is roughly as fun as being the fat guard in *T2* who gets his eye poked out by the T1000's stabby brand of justice. That said, it's mercifully easy to bag a Platinum in this shoddy movie tie-in. After all, the game only puts 12 Trophies in the way of Platinum perfection, with just 11 Gold pots between you and glory. Unlock all of the game's Trophies by simply enduring a single playthrough on Hard, which should take roughly five hours. If you're the sadistic type, invite a friend to play with you in co-op to end the torturous ordeal even quicker. The Governator would not be amused.



▼ Rocketing robots is a big Platinum bonus.



▲ Granted, *Salvation* is a turd, but it's still mildly less offensive than *T3*.

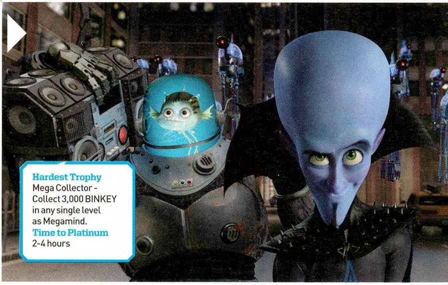
2 UP

Hardest Trophy
Ellie Badge – Complete all of the Quest Card
Time to Platinum
4-6 hours

You know you've hit Platinumville, USA (population: you) when a game offers you a Trophy just for *going into the multiplayer menu*. Yup, this surprisingly decent game based on the brilliant Pixar flick awards you a Trophy called Beginner's Wings for doing exactly that. Getting the rest of the game's Sony-sponsored trinkets is also easily doable in under seven hours. True, you have to be pretty sharp-eyed, as some Trophies revolve around collecting hidden items, but this is still one of the more gentle rides you could hope to have on the Platinum bus. Plus, it totally rewards you for butterfly genocide (kill 100 of the buggers) with the Big Hunting Badge Trophy.

3 MEGAMIND: ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN

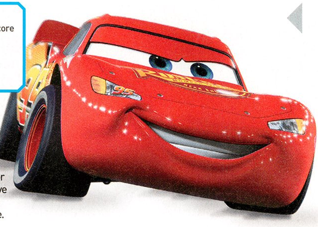
We've genuinely sat through movies that took longer to watch than *Megamind* takes to Platinum (seriously, go and rent *Ben Hur*). Every Trophy in the game can be collected in a single playthrough—which should take you less than three hours. Simply ploughing through the story mode unlocks the lion's share, while others, such as Tightanic Battle or Flash In the Pan, can be earned by offing bosses without biting it. The game's title sounds smart, but in reality you need all the intellect of a remedial howler monkey to race to this game's Platinum pot.



Hardest Trophy
Mega Collector - Collect 3,000 BINKEY in any single level as Megamind.
Time to Platinum
2-4 hours

4 CARS RACE O RAMA

Hardest Trophy
Tokyo Triumph! – Score 25,000 points in the Tokyo Mater event.
Time to Platinum
4-6 hours

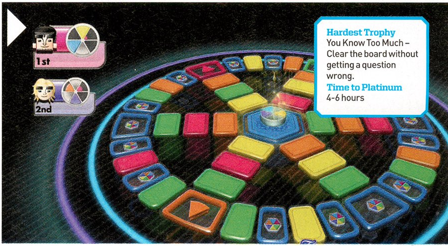


▶ We can't tell if he's being friendly or threatening. Just give up the Trophies and don't hurt us, please.

The only thing quicker than the adorable/utterly hateful and slightly disturbing motors on display here is the time it'll take you to nab a Platinum in this cartoon racer. Simply drive around the peaceful town of Radiator Springs completing challenges, such as winning races or earning high scores in drift events, to mop up most of the Trophies. For a licensed title it's more than acceptable, and it's also damn generous with the rewards with 21 Trophies made up of 14 Silvers and seven Golds. Really, who needs *NFS: Hot Pursuit* when you can bump up your Trophy haul in record time here? Am I right? Hello?

5 TRIVIAL PURSUIT

The idea of playing a virtual version of a board game may sound as appealing as having teeth pulled by acid-soaked pliers, but *Trivial Pursuit* offers a damn quick Platinum fix. Answering complex questions on politics, geography, and ancient history sounds daunting at first, until you realize that's why the good lord above created that nifty thing called Google. Acing the hardest questions in the game is a cinch with a quick Internet search. Combine this with Trophies like Come On! You're Not Even Trying!, which rewards you for getting 10 answers *wrong* in a row, and *Trivial Pursuit* offers an easy slice of Platinum pie.

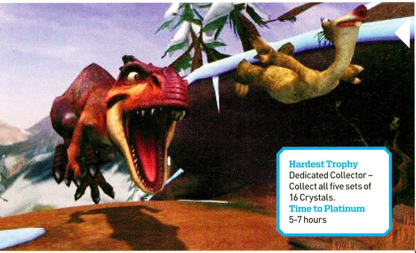


Hardest Trophy
You Know Too Much – Clear the board without getting a question wrong.
Time to Platinum
4-6 hours

6

ICE AGE: DAWN OF THE DINOSAURS

Look, don't roll your eyes. We can feel you raising those peepers to the ceiling at the sight of yet another underwhelming game based on another kids' movie. Check your inner Metacritic Nazi at the door, though, as this game is seriously easy to Platinum. Most of its Trophies can be picked up going through the short main game, while others, including the Rescue Yoko Trophy, can be sucked up by completing the minigames quickly enough. While you're at it, why not give the devs a bit of sympathy for having to work on a game about prehistoric rodents by viewing the credits in the menu. Go on—there's a Trophy in it for you.

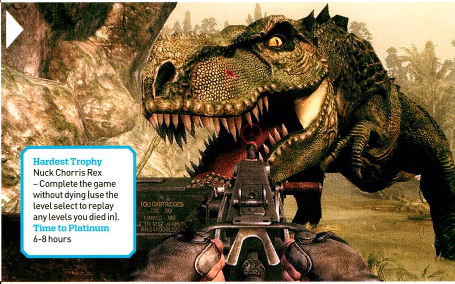


Hardest Trophy
Dedicated Collector – Collect all five sets of 16 Crystals.
Time to Platinum
5-7 hours

7

JURASSIC: THE HUNTED

To quote Jeff Goldblum in *Jurassic Park*, this is "one big pile of sh–t." The dinosaur-obsessed shooter might be a load of Cretaceous crap, but it's still one of the easiest and least time-consuming Platinums you can earn on PS3. The only slight pain is that you'll have to complete the game twice—once on Normal and again on Hard. However, you can blast through *Jurassic* in anything as brief as three-to-five hours, so it shouldn't pose too many problems. Cutely, several Trophies, such as Clever Girl (awarded for letting a raptor kill you with a grab attack), have also been named after lines from Spielberg's classic dino flick.



Hardest Trophy
Nuck Chorris Rex – Complete the game without dying (use the level select to replay any levels you died in).
Time to Platinum
6-8 hours

Hardest Trophy
Professional – Unlock 20 locked doors.
Time to Platinum
7-9 hours

8

SAW

This being a game revolving around gruesome violence to bodily appendages, you might think getting a Platinum in *SAW* would be a painful experience. Ah, how wrong you are, young Padawan. In reality, you can mine all of the game's shiny pots in one short playthrough. Important tip: in the final room, make sure you choose the door marked "Freedom" rather the one marked "Truth," as this will enable you to open both doors and score two Trophies in one sitting. Oh, and next time your mom tells you never to play with scissors for fear you might take some poor bugger's eye out, ignore her. After all, *SAW* gives you a Trophy for doing someone in with the business end of said pointy implement. Jigsaw would be so proud of you.

9

HANNAH MONTANA: THE MOVIE

If you're reading these words after seeing the above game title, then congratulations: Your obsessive-compulsive Trophy-hoovering ways clearly know no shame. Most of *Hannah's* 43 insultingly easy Trophies can be earned automatically just by going through the God-awful story mode. The only real barrier to ultra-speedy Platinum success is being willing to let your Friends List know that you've devoted several hours of your existence to a game designed for pre-teen girls. Maybe it's time you found a new hobby. We hear pottery is a hoot and a half.

▶ Yes, it's aimed at pre-teen girls. Swallow your shame and think of the Trophies.

Hardest Trophy
Crowley Meadows – Complete the game.
Time to Platinum
2-4 hours

10

WWE LEGENDS OF WRESTLEMANIA

Prepare to know your role, shut your mouth, and earn a quick Platinum in THQ's extravaganza of piledrivers and powerbombs. Most of the game's 20 Trophies can be collected by playing through and completing the WrestleMania Tour and Legend Killer modes. While the arcade-y grappling pales next to *WWE All Stars*, there is charm in recreating classic matches (including Austin and The Rock's WrestleMania XV fight) hug for manly hug. The Manager and Grapplemania Trophies are really easy places to start. Just win with a manager at ringside for the first, and only use grapples to win a match for the second.

Hardest Trophy
Super Fast Legend Killer – Become a Legend Killer in 30 minutes or less.
Time to Platinum
5-7 hours

◀ Warrior's unaware the '90s have ended. That's why he's so quick to beat.

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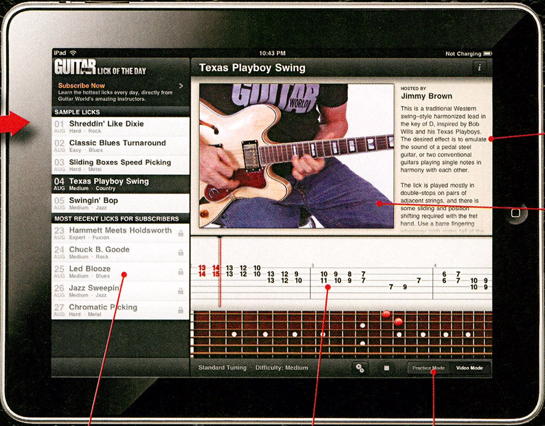
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The lick is played mostly in double-stops on pairs of adjacent strings, and there is some sliding and position shifting required with the fret hand. Use a barre fingering

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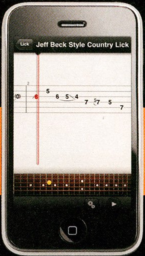
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PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

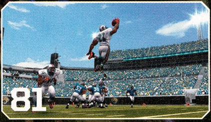
Sequels are a tricky business. Doubly so when the sequel is part of a much larger, long-running franchise. Expanding on a winning formula only makes sense, but at what point does that forumla become stale? How does a developer know when it's time to start anew? And more importantly, when that time comes, how does a developer manage the expectations of longtime fans?

In this situation, the development team must walk along the razor's edge. If the team strays too far from the path, they risk alienating all the fans their franchise has accumlutaed up to that point. Yet if they fail to innovate sufficiently, those same fans may grow bored and potential newcomers may not feel compelled to join in on the fun.

This is precisely the position the team at Project Soul found itself in. When *SoulCalibur IV* failed to achieve the same success as earlier *SC* titles, it became clear that the time for change had arrived. But could they straddle that thin line and emerge unscathed? Could they please every audience? Well, there's only one way to find out...

AMY

We love a good mystery, especially when it comes wrapped in a survival-horror game. So riddle us this, readers: What is *AMY* an acronym for?



NFL BLITZ

We here at PTOM aren't the biggest sports gamers. In fact, most of the staff are giant wimps. Yet we can't resist the bone-crunching tackles of *Blitz*. Odd!

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING

We were hoping this game would be bad just so we could use the strapline "More like *Wreck*oning! LOL!" Unfortunately, the game's actually pretty darn good.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome
Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent
Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great
Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.

7 Good
Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable
A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre
A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed
Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

3 Poor
A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful
A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage
Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.

Watch out, Voldo, you'll poke someone's eye out with that thing!

SoulCalibur V

The old blade sports a sharp new edge

Info

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev Project Soul
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like sword fighting with your friends, minus the flesh wounds.

It's easy to get nostalgic about Namco's venerable sword-fighting franchise, but *SoulCalibur V* is all about trying new things. By introducing new cast members and fresh core mechanics, developer Project Soul took a stab at making its flagship franchise more accessible to non-devout fighting fans. Change can be a scary thing, but the developer's gamble paid off: *SCV* is the most fun we've had with the series in years.

While the game retains the superb graphics and controls that have long defined the series, what sets this chapter apart are two striking adjustments: the renovated roster and the introduction of a special meter dubbed the Critical Gauge. We tend to get emotional about our attachments to our favorite fighters, so we were a little shocked to see that nearly half of the 28 combatants are fresh faces—though some blur the line between old and new.

Many series veterans have been benched, including perennial fan favorites like Kilik and Xianghua. In their place are teenage rookies wielding the same weapons but flaunting a slightly altered move set. We understand that the 17-year gap between the events of *SoulCalibur IV* and *V* ushered in a new generation of fighters, but some players may feel alienated upon seeing their *SoulCalibur* soul mate take on a new form—and that's if their missing character's been replaced at all. We were definitely bummed that there were no Talim or Zasalamel analogues in sight.

Nifty Newcomers

Still, the brand-new brawlers did their best to ease our pain. Standouts include the bizarrely named Z.W.E.I. and his petite sparring partner Viola. The former employs the aid of a gigantic wolf spirit to tear up his enemies and feels like homage to the Sega Dreamcast console's classic *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, while Viola's demanding combos can continuously juggle an opponent with help from her feisty magical orb. We also took a walk on the Italian side with Ezio of *Assassin's Creed* fame, who's no doubt one of the series' best fits as a guest character (though it's awfully hard to top Kratos from PSP's *SoulCalibur: Broken Destiny*).

The game's linear story mode revolves around two fledging fighters: Patroklos and Pyrrha, son and

Sick Burn SoulCalibur V's five goofiest quotes

"Man, do I love me some steamed buns! Oh yeah!"
—*Xiba*

"Not my fault...you brought this on yourself!"
—*Pyrrha*

"You lack imagination. It's like fighting a rock!"
—*Z.W.E.I.*

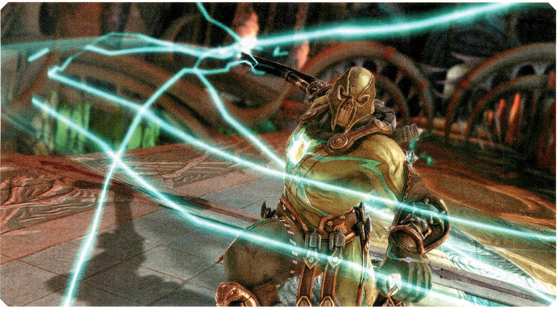
"Damn you, maggot! Take this! I'll cut you to shreds!"
—*Astaroth*

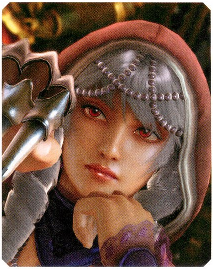
"Flee before you destroy yourself."
—*Viola*

▲ The stage designs feel much more alive, with plenty of medieval battles raging in the background.

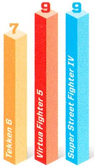
2
Patroklos
51
Rebels 3/3
0

▲ *SCV*'s new Critical Guage meter changes the series' action for the better.





daughter of the now-deceased shield-bearer Sophitia. Patroklos' obsession with eradicating the evil Malfested takes a backseat as he searches for his lost sister, who's fallen in with the wrong crowd (i.e. Tira and Soul Edge). The story's told via some spiffy cutscenes and a plethora of rush-job sketches, and comes packed with hammy voice acting and corny twists. But we have to admit, by the time we wrapped up the final chapter, the protagonists had actually grown on us—and that's no small feat for a fighting game plot.



ScorePole

SCV easily holds its own against the holy trinity of fighting series.

Super Swordplay

As we've learned from hardcore fighter fans, a game's mechanics ultimately decide its lasting appeal and fun factor. Project Soul listened intently to complaints about *SCIV*, and they've done an impressive job of ironing out its imperfections. We don't remotely mourn the passing of *SCIV's* lame Critical Finish system, which let us perform one-hit kills if confusing criteria were met during a match. In its place, we find the vastly superior Critical Gauge meter.

Taking a page from the meter-management metagame of recent brawlers like *Street Fighter IV* and *Mortal Kombat*, the Critical Gauge builds to a maximum of two bars. We can expend one full bar to strike with a Critical Edge—a flashy super move that does a hefty chunk of damage. They're easily implemented into combos, and they're not so frequent as to disrupt the tempo of a match. Alternatively, we can empower our normal attacks with the Brave Edge move or go on the defensive with Guard Impacts. Always having options for how to best use our meter gives *SCV* a layer of strategy the previous games simply lacked.

Online play has also been modernized, with a Rival system (strive to surpass select opponents) and *SFIV*-like earned titles. Once we finished the story, all that was left to do on our own was grind through the online-play simulation of Quick Battle mode or smash our controllers in abject frustration while fighting the god-like A.I. of the Legendary Souls mode. But *SoulCalibur* has always been a game that's best enjoyed with company, so if we've had our fill of 2D fighters, *SoulCalibur V* will be the game we bust out to get us hyped all over again.

LUCAS SULLIVAN

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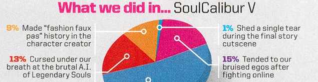
What we did in... SoulCalibur V



AMY

Putting the horror in horrible

Info
Format PSN **Pub** Lexis Numérique
Dev VectorCell/Lexis Numérique
Price $9.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like *Silent Hill* with some clumsy new moves.

Aside from including more action and gunplay, survival horror games haven't changed much since the early days of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*, so we were pleasantly surprised to find downloadable fright-fest *AMY* actually adds some interesting mechanics. Unfortunately, it doesn't get the basics right.

After a crashed comet starts spreading a zombie-fying virus, protagonist Lana must help a little girl get to safety. Though the game mainly mixes *Dead Space*-like situational puzzles, *Silent Hill*-style melee combat, and the freaky moodiness of both, the campaign also features *Metal Gear Solid*-ish stealth kills and the ability to hide. The kid also proves rather useful, as she can crawl through air ducts into locked rooms and unlock doors from the inside. This even helps avoid the usual issues with escort missions by not making the kid a dumbass who runs straight into danger.

Sadly, the rest of the game doesn't live up to the promise of these new ideas. In addition to occasional graphical and control glitches, the story suffers from some glaring narrative inconsistencies that include typically useless magic-like psychic abilities as well as woefully unaware enemies. Ultimately these issues undermine what were some interesting steps in a new-ish direction and leave *AMY* a scary mess. PAUL SEMEL

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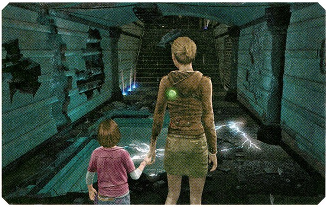
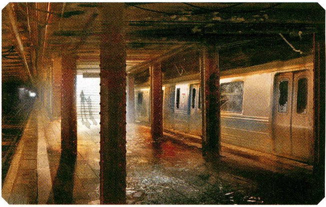


Like most kids, *AMY* is in desperate need of some adult supervision, though even that might not be enough to solve its techincal problems.



Trine 2 has a fun, involving story. Pay attention to the small details—there's a lot of contextual information to be found.

Trine 2

Fantasy at its finest

Info
Format PSN
Pub Atlus
Dev Frozenbyte
Price $14.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like saving the princess one puzzle at a time.

Once upon a time, a small dev team created a 2D puzzle platformer called *Trine* that mesmerized us with its good looks and storybook tales. It was filled with clever puzzles and a likeable cast of heroes tasked with saving a forsaken kingdom—a kingdom once again in need of its champions.

Trine 2 is a similarly clever puzzler built on the framework of its predecessor, with a vibrant art style and meticulous attention to detail. Thankfully, it's a game infused with beauty *and* brains. When we weren't busy drooling over the holy-crap-it's-so-pretty aesthetic, we were solving *Trine 2's* many puzzles. To do so, we switched between the game's three principle characters—a thief, warrior, and wizard, each with unique abilities—on the fly. It's a mechanic that's easy to master while allowing for a lot of variation in puzzle design. Combat occasionally relieved our puzzle-induced head-scratching and did a fine job of changing things up.

So, too, did *Trine 2's* three-player co-op mode (local and online), though playing with friends introduced wonky camera angles and made puzzles substantially easier. Why solve a puzzle to reach a high ledge when we could use the wizard's conjuration and levitation skills to safely transport our entire team to the objective? Still, *Trine 2* is easily PSN's prettiest game and is definitely worth the price of admission. RYAN TALJONICK

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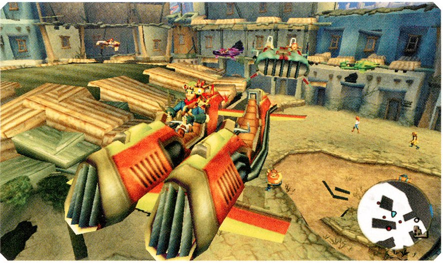
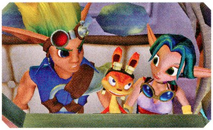


Jak and Daxter Collection

Great memories, decent execution



Mouthy sidekick Daxter remains as hilarious (and mildly annoying) as ever.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** SCEA
Dev Mass Media/Naughty Dog
Price $39.99 **ESRB** Everyone–Teen **It's like** seeing old pals after a long gap.

Long before its *Uncharted* series kept PS3 consoles happily humming for hours on end, Naughty Dog introduced gamers to Jak and Daxter, whose odd-couple relationship (the former an angsty teen, the latter a furry wiseass) and platform-traversing escapades generated a trio of beloved PS2-exclusive adventures. Fingers remain crossed for a proper modern-day revival, but aficionados can put those hands to better use for the time being with the *Jak and Daxter Collection*, which outfits all three core entries with high-definition widescreen visuals, 3D support, and a full set of Trophies for each campaign.

As they did when the series debuted a decade ago, the three titles offer memorable and surprisingly distinct experiences. *The Precursor Legacy* is the simplest and brightest of the bunch, continuing the studio's aesthetic from *Crash Bandicoot* with a strong focus on item collection by completing myriad tasks. *Jak II* arrives in stark contrast to the original, with the titular hero infected with Dark Eco powers that transform him into a raging beast, while a grim urban setting and the addition of firearms further set the less-cheery mood. And while *Jak 3* expands upon its predecessor with new weapons and a Light Eco form, it also shifts the locale to a large desert city and adds in more vehicle segments.

It's easy to see why Jak and Daxter's exploits enraptured fans upon release, with the vibrant characters and stellar world designs still shining through, along with an ever-shifting variety of objectives that keep things interesting. Sadly, some of the elements haven't aged as well, with major camera issues, occasional platforming woes, and truly atrocious checkpoints throughout the trilogy. The high-definition bump is also less remarkable than in other re-releases (like *The Sly Collection*), with *The Precursor Legacy* looking downright rough in parts, while the decently detailed sequels still appear dated.

Jak and Daxter Collection feels more like a lightly upgraded historical document than a lovingly tweaked attempt to make these aging classics shine for a modern audience. But it's still a set of favorites in its best form to date, and seeing the duo in HD should only embolden fans' collective desire for a true comeback. ANDREW HAYWARD

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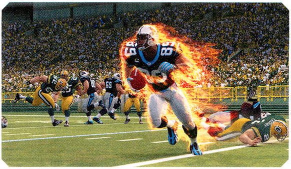
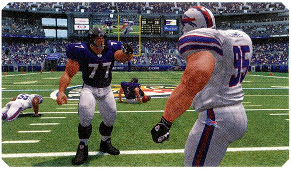


Yes, being on fire *does* make a player more difficult to tackle.



NFL Blitz

Cue the endzone dancing

Info

Format PSN
Pub EA Sports
Dev EA Tiburon
Price $14.99
ESRB Teen
It's like the No Fun League strikes again.

Hanging out with old friends after time apart can be hard. But while something may feel a bit off at first, ultimately, you'll probably still have a great time.

That's kind of what playing the HD remake of *NFL Blitz* is like. Everything feels very much like we remember when it was originally released in 1997. Players are still supernaturally huge, hits crushing, penalties nonexistent. But just like that old friend, it's learned a few new things since we last saw it. Along with online play, there's the new Gauntlet mode that pits us against increasingly difficult teams, unlocking some super-powerful ones upon victory. For the collector, there's Elite League mode, a collectible card game that allows us to create custom teams to take to the gridiron.

Indeed, the gameplay has aged fairly well, though something does feel a bit off. Vitally hilarious in the arcades, late hits are no longer allowed, exemplifying the loss of some of that classic arcade feel that made the original so loved. Things just feel less primitive, less crazy than the old days. Still, the experience as a whole suffers only slightly, and we're left with an endlessly engaging arcade title any gamer can enjoy. TAYLOR COCKE

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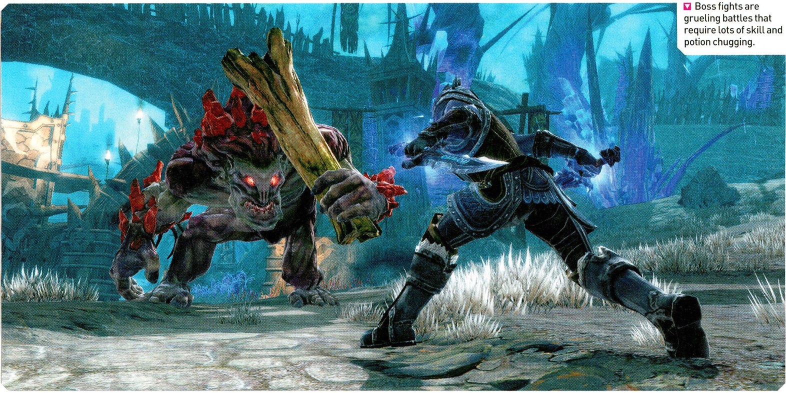


Boss fights are grueling battles that require lots of skill and potion chugging.

Kingdoms of Amalur Reckoning

Borrowing from the best of both worlds

Info

PS3
RECKONING

Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev 38 Studios/ Big Huge Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like an open-ended *Darksiders* with tons of quests and loot.

It wouldn't be much of a stretch to describe *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* as a patchwork project. It's an expansive RPG that takes the best elements from action games and RPGs alike—the fluid combat of *Darksiders*, the gratuitous piles of loot and dungeon crawling of *Dungeon Siege III*, the huge world and crafting elements of *Skyrim*—and weaves them together to form an enchanting whole.

Threads of Fate

At the core of *Reckoning* lies a gorgeously detailed world bursting with bright neon colors and steeped in intriguing, Tolkein-esque fantasy lore. Our hero is killed in a war between a group of violent immortal beings and the rest of mortal kind, then is brought back to life in a heinous experiment. Having been recently resurrected, he alone is free of the shackles of fate, his destiny now in our hands. Literally.

Unlike most RPGs, we weren't forced to choose a single playstyle for our character. Instead, *Reckoning* brilliantly shuns the pick-a-class-and-stick-with-it constraints of traditional RPGs by presenting a fresh, action-oriented experience. We developed our combat style and skills via *Reckoning's* Destiny system, allotting skill points in one of three ability trees (essentially warrior, mage, and thief). Pumping points into a specific tree scored us a new Destiny—a specialized class with powerful role-specific buffs—and spreading points into multiple trees formed hybrid Destinies. We adored the ability to create any kind of character we wanted and developed a particular attachment to our sword-wielding battle mage with powerful protective magics. Best of all, our points could be reset at any time during the game (for a small fee, of course), giving us the freedom to experiment with various character builds in a single playthrough—a mechanic we grew to love.

Sculpting a monster-wrecking badass and testing our might in battle quickly became one of *Reckoning's*

Who's Who In the world of Amalur

1 **Fae**
The Fae are a traditionally peaceful race of immortals—until a violent splinter group started waging war on mortal kind.

2 **Niskaru**
An ancient race of evil creatures thought to have been eradicated, the Niskaru have mysteriously returned.

3 **Warsworn**
The Warsworn are a group of swords-for-hire, but were once charged with hunting Niskaru in times past.

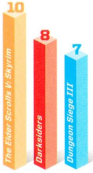
4 **Travelers**
Reckoning's version of a thieves' guild, the Travelers are adept at pickpocketing and robbing people blind.

5 **Fateweavers**
Gifted individuals who can read the tapestry of fate. They are cursed with knowing the destinies of everyone they meet.

When it comes to obnoxiously large weaponry, *Reckoning* sets new standards...though its swords did do wonders for our self-confidence.

Amalur is gorgeous. Vibrant hues of color stretch in every direction as far as the eye can see.

greatest highlights. At first glance, combat follows a standard template familiar to *God of War* vets: attack, dodge, attack, block. Yet after encountering a few tough fights (especially some challenging bosses), battles began to reveal their complexity by employing the timing and combo-chaining elements of fighting games. Engaging the enemy was delightfully fun, and experimenting with how best to combo our many abilities became addicting. Fights were fast, bloody, and brutal, easily earning *Reckoning* its Mature rating. We were hooked.



ScorePole
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning offers a solid action RPG experience.

Adventure Time

Reckoning is packed with a generous amount of stuff: lots of dungeons, hundreds of quests, and mountains of loot. But it's not all golden. Take, for instance, the absurd amount of gear we accumulated during our time in Amalur. An average piece of equipment would last around 30 minutes before we replaced it—which is fine, except having access to a plethora of items killed our interest in the crafting system. We couldn't be bothered to forge a new pair of daggers when we'd probably find a better set in the next dungeon anyway.

The game is also marred by occasional audio lag and bland character animations during dialog sequences, but these shortcomings are easily overlooked. There's plenty to do and see, and the staggering number of quests kept us playing for more than 60 hours. Some were monotonous fetch quests, but many—especially missions for important factions and guilds—were well thought out and provided a wealth of information about the world's intricate history.

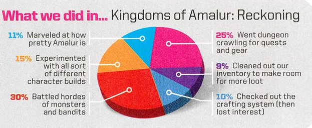
The real issue is that we never felt truly immersed in Amalur—it felt like it existed solely as an outlet for our RPG desires, a virtual playground filled with monsters, skill points, and magic. It's expansive and fun, but ultimately artificial. Though billed as an open-world game, it never materialized into the distinct destination we craved. Every new zone and town felt like a quest hub as opposed to an actual place, and we explored caves and dungeons not for the sake of exploration, but because they were home to quest goals and loot caches.

Reckoning is a collage of great ideas, to be sure, but lacks a personality of its own. Still, we were always happy to return to Amalur to get our RPG fix by cranking out one more quest or tackling one more boss. *Reckoning* may not set new RPG standards by any means, but it's an earnest attempt at encapsulating everything we love about the genre as a whole.

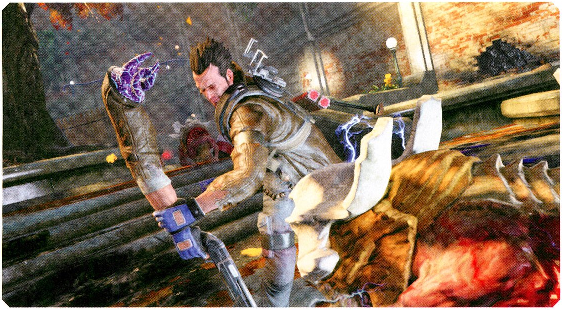
PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

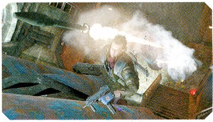
RYAN TALJONICK

What we did in... Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning



Bryce was cursed with immortality 500 years ago by the same demons he's thwarting in *NeverDead's* modern-day setting.





NeverDead

This one needs more than a hand

Info

Format PS3
Pub Konami
Dev Rebellion
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like chopping off our head just to spite the brain.

Like any demon hunter worth his weight in slain souls, *NeverDead's* Bryce Boltzmann deals death behind bullets and blades while dropping one-liners and hellhounds in equal measure. What differentiates him from the Dantes and Garcia Hotspurs, however, is his inability to die. He's immortal, and it's this little wrinkle that separates this third-person action-adventure from the pack. Bryce can perform a number of macabre tricks, such as using his severed appendages as monster bait and rolling his head about like a bowling ball. While *NeverDead's* gameplay is built almost entirely around the concept of tearing the poor guy limb from limb, the promising hook soon becomes more gimmicky than game-changing.

Seeing Bryce used and abused is initially entertaining; collecting his scattered limbs and torso by rolling his decapitated noggin' over them is good fun, as is sprouting new arms and legs. We even sorta enjoyed his cheesy quips, like "I'm gonna need a hand, literally," at first. Sadly, this schtick grows repetitive and quickly becomes more frustrating than fun.

This is primarily due to the fact that we spent more time trying to put Bryce back together than we did battling demons. Even low-level minions can rip him apart in seconds, making it impossible for the gun- and swordplay to ever achieve a satisfying rhythm. It's hard to feel like a badass when we can't even empty a clip before having to collect our wayward head from the floor. The game attempts to counter this by letting our loose limbs continue to fire weapons and our head perform spin attacks, but these abilities aren't nearly as effective as simply reassembling Bryce and getting him back behind his traditional weapons. It doesn't help that battles lack the lightning-fast fluidity of games like *Bayonetta*, where switching from ranged to melee combat is an effortless affair. Instead, a cumbersome amount of button inputs stand between unleashing a barrage of bullets and letting the leash off an up-close blade attack.

NeverDead does show some promise. Boss battles follow the familiar find-the-glowing-weak-point formula, but make better use of Bryce's abilities: tossing his gun-clutching arm into a beast's gaping maw to shoot it from the inside is pretty inventive. Solving puzzles by navigating his chatty head through otherwise inaccessible areas is also cool. His female sidekick, Arcadia, is a welcome addition as well, bringing both personality and extra firepower to the equation. Still, these bright spots aren't nearly enough to elevate *NeverDead* above its frustrating combat and flawed concept. MATT CABRAL

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BlazBlue: Continuum Shift EXTEND

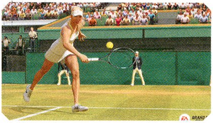
Format **PS3** Pub **Aksys Games** Dev **Arc System Works** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Teen**

It may not be a true sequel, but for those who've fallen out of touch with the *BlazBlue* franchise, this is the one to own. It's a no-brainer buy for brawler enthusiasts thanks to balance tweaks and the experts-only gauntlet of Unlimited Mars mode, but the value to a series newcomer is also tremendous. The 19-character roster compiles every combatant from previous versions (including DLC pugilists), and the hand-drawn sprites are as stunning as ever. For 2D fighter fans, *EXTEND* is $40 well spent. LUCAS SULLIVAN

PlayStation 8

Grand Slam Tennis 2

Format **PS3** Pub **EA Sports** Dev **EA Canada** Price **$49.99** ESRB **Everyone**



Last year's genre-leading *Top Spin 4* offered excellent graphics, accessible but deep gameplay, and superb online play. *GST2* nearly matches *TS4* across the board, but while its new dual-stick-centric Total Racquet Control system offers an admirable array of shots, it's also susceptible to unintended outcomes. We never quite felt confident that, for example, a topspin shot wouldn't result when we meant to deliver a slice. The game looks and moves nicely, but texture quality, minor pop-in issues, and repeating commentary kept it from being topnotch. *GST2* doesn't yet match up to its main tennis rival, but it still has game.

ROGER BURCHILL

PlayStation 7

Choplifter HD

Format **PSN** Pub **inXile Entertainment** Dev **inXile Entertainment** Price **$14.99** ESRB **Teen**

Airlifting wounded soldiers and wayward news reporters to safety while under heavy fire is simple, heart-pounding fun in this clever re-envisioning of the 2D side-scrolling '80s classic. The need to be mindful of gas, ammo, and the safety of passengers gives *Choplifter HD's* dynamic but straightforward gameplay some added challenge. We even enjoyed backtracking for a better score to unlock the more powerful choppers needed to withstand the brutal barrages of later stages. It's great that the humor flows as freely as the gunfire, too. Wacky additions like a zombie invasion mission add further punch to the reboot. NATHAN MEUNIER

PlayStation 8

DLC Roundup

DC Universe Online
Lightning Strikes

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen**

This high-voltage DLC both covers new ground and delves back into history to revisit how The Flash came to be. It adds a new electricity power set that boasts new offensive and support moves to tinker with, and there are also plenty of new characters and missions to try out.

Duke Nukem Forever
The Doctor Who Cloned Me

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

Kicking our own ass seems a bit odd, but battling off an army of cloned Dukes is the order of the day in this explosive DLC campaign that holds down the fort with a punchier story and more absurd humor. Get ready to re-curbstomp Dr. Proton into the next century.

Download of the Month

Battlefield 3 Back To Karkand

Price $14.99 **ESRB** Mature

Revisit the newly decimated streets of Karkand in this homage to the *Battlefield* franchise's earlier entries. Four classic maps have been given a fresh coat of paint and re-worked with the Frostbite 2 engine, offering up a grittier, rubble-strewn landscape to battle across and more opportunities for massive destruction.

Game of Thrones
The Complete First Season
Epic and amazing

Info

1080p FULL HD VIDEO
DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO
GAME OF THRONES
THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

Price $79.98
Creators David Benioff, D.B Weiss, George R.R. Martin
Starring Sean Bean, Lena Headey, Peter Dinklage, Jason Momoa
Rated Not Rated
Extras Documentaries, in-episode guides, commentary, tons of background material.

Given the already high caliber of HBO's series, it's not surprising that their adaptation of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy book series is terrific. For long-standing fans and newcomers alike, *Game of Thrones* is a superb piece of television. Turning the massive, layered novels into coherent, bite-sized episodes was no small feat, but HBO has done an amazing job. Even those who found the novels a bit too heavy on the politics and back-stabbing between its massive cast will find the show's expert pacing and intense action and plotting addictive.

Thrones isn't typical fantasy. The focus is far removed from monsters, sorcery, and magic rings, instead focusing on a myriad of complex, driven characters, most of who are morally bankrupt and self-serving. The path the story takes will be familiar to fans of the novels, but still riveting to see in action. Newcomers, however, will find an array of shocking surprises and unexpected twists.

While the writing is easily some of the best on television, the entire production is of nearly unrivaled quality. The cast is terrific from top to bottom, and the sets and locations bring the fantasy world of the Seven Kingdoms to vivid life. *Thrones* also doesn't skimp on the usual levels of adult content HBO is known for and easily earns its TV-MA rating. Sex and violence are portrayed in a gritty and realistic manner, with no shortage of either.

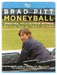
Beyond the actual show, HBO has gone out of their way to pack this release with plenty of extras. There's an array of material covering all aspects of the show, including an hour-long documentary, cast and crew commentary for most episodes, Easter eggs, character and historical profiles, and in-episode guides that provide world details while watching the show. The Blu-ray edition really manages to shine here thanks to its sterling presentation and slew of additional extras over the standard DVD version.

Thrones is amazing television, pure and simple. It's dark, gritty, and harsh with a story full of amoral bastards and vicious violence, yet still utterly engaging. **JASON D'APRILE**

PlayStation The Official Magazine
9

Moneyball

A completely new ball game



Info

Price $35.99 **Creators** Bennett Miller, Steven Zaillian, Aaron Sorkin **Starring** Brad Pitt, Jonah Hill, Philip Seymour Hoffman **Rated** PG-13 **Extras** Background featurettes.

This isn't a typical baseball movie by any stretch. While most great sports films tend to be accessible and entertaining even for viewers who aren't fans, *Moneyball* takes a much bolder tact. In fact, it may not appeal to hardcore baseball fans who are a bit too emotionally attached to the nostalgic and arguably outdated way the sport has been played.

Moneyball is all about the backroom mechanics of the game. Its focus on the management style of a low-budget team versus high-budget competitors is fascinating and complex. Brad Pitt is excellent as the Oakland Athletics' general manager, Billy Beane, and Jonah Hill shows off impressive (and uncharacteristic) acting depth as his assistant GM. The entire cast is great and gamers will get a kick out of seeing Activision CEO Bobby Kotick's cameo as the A's owner.

The real meat of the movie is how Beane, struggling with his team's far-smaller budget and constantly losing his best players to bigger teams, adapts to his situation and makes sports history in the process—against a tide of criticism from both so-called experts and fans. The actual playing of baseball is almost secondary to the overall story here, which is based on the non-fiction book of the same name.

The end result might be a bit too slow-paced and dry for some, and the movie has a tendency to meander and hang on documentary-style shots purely for effect. All the same, there's a feeling of authentic baseball magic here, grounded in reality. When the A's manage a record-breaking win streak after losing what most considered their best players, it feels like a sports fantasy come to life.

Given the movie's basis in reality, it's disappointing there aren't more extras. The disc comes with a few short features about the backdrop of the story, but commentary from the writers and cast would have been far more insightful. Either way, this is an impressively bold, and different, baseball movie that's well worth watching. JD

PlayStation The Official Magazine 8

Blu-ray Roundup

In the Name of the King 2: Two Worlds

Price $29.99 **Rated** R

Uwe Boll's latest cinematic travesty doesn't disappoint. The script is terrible, the pacing and editing are amateurish, and the dialogue is inane. On the upside, leading man Dolph Lundgren looks and acts like a cranky old man lost in a creepy LARPer convention, who seems to be winging his dialogue and insulting everyone. 3

Apollo 18

Price $39.99 **Rated** PG-13

Intense, well paced, and fascinating, *Apollo 18* is an effective example of sci-fi horror on a budget. It feels more cinematic than most found-footage films, and for fans of our space-going history, its conspiracy-theory hook of what happened during a tragic and top-secret Apollo mission is irresistible. 8

Archer: Season Two

Price $39.99 **Rated** Not Rated

We live in a golden age of adult-themed animation and *Archer* is a perfect example why. This absurdly funny spoof of the spy genre is consistently terrific and creative with great plot twists and a hilarious cast of characters. Don't miss out. 9

Futurama: Volume 6

Price $39.99 **Rated** Not Rated

More *Futurama* is always a good thing, even if the show's return isn't as great as the original series. There's no shortage of laughs and sci-fi antics—more than enough to make this a must-own purchase for animation loving geeks. 7

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

Digitech 2.7-inch Digital Microscope

Want close ups? This 50x–200x digital microscope magnifies the tiniest spores on its 2.7-inch LCD, using a CMOS sensor to capture stills and even record video to SD cards.

$150

digitech-i.com

Manastash Reversible 100 Parka

Featuring Primaloft insulation that allows maximum warmth and breathability, this water-resistant, lightweight insulated jacket is made from ecological materials.

$300

manastash.com

Click Keypad Hidden Time

Let your inner geek shine through with this unique timepiece. Functioning keys emulate the number pad on your keyboard: Press a button and numbers will blink a time-telling sequence.

$90

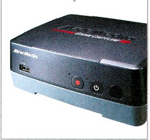
watchismo.com

AverMedia Game Capture HD

This simple device captures HD video in 1080i resolution right from the PS3 to an external or internal hard drive without the use of a PC. It can also capture screens with the press of a button.

$150

avermedia-usa.com



Glidetrack Mobislyder

Home videos looking a bit shaky or lacking cinematic punch? The Mobislyder essentially fuses a Hollywood-style roll track with a skateboard, allowing smooth zooms and tracking shots.

$135

mobislyder.com

Samsung Galaxy Nexus

Androids take note: The newest Google phone has arrived. Its 4.65-inch 1280x720 Super AMOLED display is not only sharp but also ginormous. It also runs the latest Android OS, Ice Cream Sandwich.

$300 w/contract

google.com/nexus

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

HELLO
my name is
Chris

This is **Chris**, hardcore gamer. He's been playing games ever since he could grip a controller. When he was growing up, **his parents used the ESRB** ratings to choose the games that were right for him. One day he'll use the ratings to **decide what games his kids play** – he just doesn't know it yet.

mail@ptom

From spine ripping to parents who just don't understand, PTOM sets the record straight

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

PS3
PSP
PS VITA
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
Issue 054 January 2012
WAR!
MW3 vs. BF3
Showdown
PlayStation's New Year's resolutions
2012's
HUGEST GAMES
22-page blowout on the next wave of great games
PS VITA
Blasts off in Japan
REVIEWED
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
Assassin's Creed: Revelations
Need for Speed: The Run
WWE '12 | And more!
Future
RAINBOW 6 RESIDENT
URA'S WRATH HITMAN

So a ninja, a space marine, and a demon slayer walk onto a magazine cover... Oh crap, they saw us, run!

Uncharted Territory

I won't waste any time praising *Uncharted 3*. We all know it's a fantastic entry in the Drake storyline. What I want to talk about is the Drake movie. It's been on again, off again for a while, and I wonder: why not a feature-length cartoon like *Hellboy: Blood & Iron*? It would be easier to make, cost a buttload less, and could keep the same voice talent for all the principle characters, which would be a huge plus. Or maybe better yet, a TV series? I loved how we saw the origin of Sully and Drake's relationship, so why not a series that tells us some of Drake's adventures between then and now? A live-action film runs the risk of becoming just another lame adaptation of a popular videogame—not to mention the problem of finding the right person to play him and the ensuing arguments over why they didn't pick Nathan Fillion. I'd watch an animated flick or a TV series in a heartbeat.

WILLIAM ANGUS NEW JERSEY

We like the way you think, William. A smaller project could definitely give Naughty Dog a bit more control over how Drake gets treated. On the other hand, we're having a hard time picturing an animated Nathan Drake. For some reason it just keeps coming out all G.I. Joe, *and all we can think about is Drake yelling, "Pork chop sandwiches!"*

Let's Review...

Hey there, PTOM! You guys did an awesome job on the reveal of *Prototype 2*. Your review on that makes me want to buy that game! Thanks! **TRAVIS** THE INTERNET

Okay, this needs to stop. Not the compliments—those are great. We're talking about confusing previews for reviews. While these sort of letters aren't super common, we do get them from time to time, so let's be clear: If you don't see a score, it's not a review. Some hands-on previews may contain measured opinions about the game thus far, but that doesn't make the article a review. Sorry if it's not always crystal clear, but hey, now you know.

Discontented

I choose where to buy my games based on which store gives me the best service, so I don't like exclusive pre-order bonuses that try to force me to buy from GameStop, as I strongly dislike the way they conduct business. With all the complaining I hear about used game sales and developers/publishers losing money because of it, I expected GameStop to start receiving less and

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

less content seeing as they're the biggest sellers of used games, but it's been the exact opposite. Things like this really sour the experience for me and make me not even want the game anymore.

JESUS THE INTERNET

You make an excellent point, but truth be told, publishers need GameStop whether they like it or not. While, fundamentally, it doesn't make sense for publishers to do GameStop any favors while GameStop actively undercuts their profits, publishers aren't going to sell nearly as many copies of their new games if those games don't appear on store shelves. And since GameStop is one of the biggest names in videogame retail, they enjoy certain benefits...like pre-order bonuses. Such is business.

Assumptions

I noticed a mistake on the cover page of your January issue (issue 054). You have the word "ass" right between Commander Shepard's knees. Now, I am assuming his legs are cutting off the title of *Mass Effect 3*...or am I on to something? Did I find a hidden message left by your editors? What are your editors really up to? Hmm...

TONY WATERS GRAND JUNCTION, COLO.

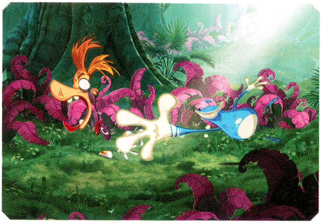
Fun fact: there's at least one hidden message on every single PTOM cover. Think you can find them all? Hint: We're totally kidding and this was all just a hilarious coincidence that only occurred on subscribers' issues. Consider it a loyalty bonus!

Manual Update

I purchased *NHL 12* not so long ago only to find there was no physical manual, only an online manual. Recently I purchased *Saints Row: The Third*, and again, only an online manual. I know about the rain forest and all that blah blah, but if I'm paying upwards of $60 for a game, I expect a physical manual. Am I the only one who likes to get a cup of coffee and kick his feet up and look over a manual before playing?

FM CASE THE INTERNET

We're with you, FM. As you might have guessed, we're big fans of things printed on paper. Besides, what else are we supposed to do while the game installs and our system updates (again)?



Spineless

I don't know if it's my rough, tough Canadian man-hands or just a lack of glue, but I do have a tendency to rip the spine from the mag like a Sub-Zero finishing move.

TELLYMONSTER CANADA

Do you shout "FATALITY" every time you finish reading an issue? Maybe you are Sub-Zero.

I'm Mature, Not Immature

I have never been allowed to play Mature-rated games. Ever. *Ever.* My parents think that if I play violent videogames, I may think that killing is okay. I don't know what I can say to my parents to get them to let me own *Skyrim*. I don't think I've ever wanted something so much in my life. I can handle the games and I'm smart enough to know that killing is not allowed, but I'm almost positive that I will not be allowed to play it.So I ask this: What do I say? How can I convince them? *Please* give me some advice.

CONNOR P THE INTERNET

Let us start with this humble piece of wisdom: Even if you feel your parents are being unfair, just remember that they genuinely believe they're doing what's best for you, and hey, they're just people too. Now, judging by your writing and your strategic, reasoned approach to convincing them, you probably are mature enough to play "Mature" games. If you don't resort to "BUT MOOOM!" tactics, you may actually have a shot at this. Keep the conversation respectful and adult, and they may be impressed enough to capitulate.

Ask Ryan

Q **I recently converted my friend into a gamer with *Portal 2*, but I'm having a hard time finding suitable follow-ups. Please help!**

PATRICK
THE INTERNET

A Well, Patrick, the next game you play should definitely be *Rayman Origins*. It's simple enough to be accessible to a newcomer but still tons of cooperative fun. After that, maybe try something a bit more hardcore like *Resident Evil 5*, *Resistance 3*, or *Saints Row: The Third*? If that fails, there's always *LittleBigPlanet 2*, *Trine 2*, or any of the *LEGO* games. Enjoy!

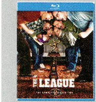
Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

Everyday Sunshine: The Story of Fishbone

"Nothing has excited me as much in recent memory as this documentary. Fishbone provided the soundtrack of my youth and ranks with the most talented, creative, and—sadly—underappreciated bands of the past 30 years."

ROGER BURCHILL



The League

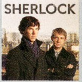
"You don't have to be a Fantasy Football freak to enjoy jokes about sex, drugs and diarrhera. With Season 3 just ended, you have the off season to catch up."

KEN BOUSQUET

Star Wars: The Old Republic

"Yeah, I'm a PlayStation gamer at heart—but that doesn't mean I can't get addicted to PC MMOs. *The Old Republic* is my latest squeeze. I'm the baddest Sith Marauder around."

RYAN TALJONICK



Sherlock

"Though the recent *Sherlock Holmes* movies have been uninspired action pieces, the BBC series *Sherlock* is a wonderfully written modern realization of Holmes and Watson's early adventures."

ANNE LEWIS

PS3 Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games

NEW
PS3
UNCHARTED 3
DRAKE'S DECEPTION
NAUGHTY DOG

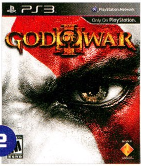
1

Cliffhanging Action

Uncharted 3
Drake's Deception

A PS3 essentials collection without *Uncharted* is like a life without air. This love child of Lara Croft and Indiana Jones is a deft blend of storytelling, memorable characters, and action gameplay.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Naughty Dog**



PS3
GOD OF WAR III

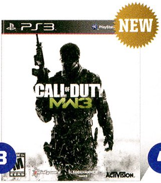
2

Acts of Vengeance

God of War III

Huge beautiful battlegrounds and brutally gory fights with magnificent climaxes: we expected the world from the finale of Kratos' trilogy and we got it. A must-have for anyone with even the slightest amount of bloodlust.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Santa Monica Studio**



NEW
PS3
CALL OF DUTY
MW3
ACTIVISION

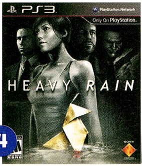
3

First-Person Shooter

Call of Duty
Modern Warfare 3

Keeping up with the modern combat Jones' and the franchise's sterling history isn't easy, but *MW3* offers new and improved multiplayer modes and an epic conclusion to the trilogy's storyline.

9
Pub **Activision**
Dev **Infinity Ward**



PS3
HEAVY RAIN

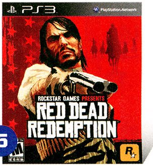
4

Adventure

Heavy Rain

Innovative, intriguing, and immersive, *Heavy Rain* is one of the most original titles in years. The mystery of the Origami Killer will keep you guessing until it's solved… or until the heroes die in the process.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Quantic Dream**



PS3
ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS
RED DEAD REDEMPTION

5

Open-World Shooter

Red Dead Redemption

Continuing with its record of amazing titles, Rockstar's latest open-world game combines a drop-dead gorgeous Old West with a mesmerizing story and fabulous characters.

10
Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar SD/North**

NEW
PS3
BATMAN
ARKHAM CITY

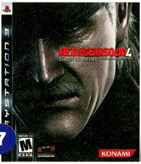
6

Action Adventure

Batman
Arkham City

PTOM's 2011 PS3 Game of the Year, *Arkham City* presents us with a deliciously realized open world—even more reason to fall in love with Gotham's dark underbelly and its determined protector.

10
Pub **Warner Bros. Int.**
Dev **Rocksteady**



METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
KONAMI

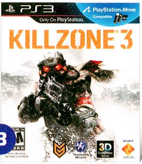
7

Stealth Action

Metal Gear Solid 4

Hideo Kojima's masterpiece might be criticized for its lengthy cutscenes and convoluted storyline, but that shouldn't stop anyone from experiencing one of the most important games on any platform today.

10
Pub **Konami**
Dev **Kojima Productions**



PS3
PlayStation Move
KILLZONE 3

8

First-Person Shooter

Killzone 3

War isn't pretty—unless you're playing *Killzone 3*. But the latest clash between the ISA and Helghast ventures beyond great graphics with improvements to combat, storyline, and multiplayer that propel it to the FPS genre's top ranks.

10
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Guerrilla Games**

PS3
SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV
CAPCOM

9

Fighter

Super Street Fighter IV

An update to the best fighting game from the most well-respected series in gaming history makes for a can't-miss title. Kicking heads and nostalgia combine to form one perfect package.

10
Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**

NEW
PS3
SAINTS ROW
THE THIRD
THQ

10

Sandbox Shooter

Saints Row
The Third

Saints Row is for those who want more Cat Men and exploding octopi in their games. Loaded with whacky side quests and a story that kept us fascinated, *The Third* is good ol' dirty fun.

10
Pub **THQ**
Dev **Volition**

Team Choice

Battlefield 3

"Though not without its flaws [the single-player is lacking], *Battlefield* offers a variety of intense multiplayer modes that I'll be playing for quite a while. The stunning audio and visual quality of the game further adds to the enthralling online experience."

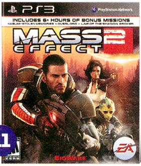
Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor

Power
Custom silicon harnesses crisp HD, ear-splitting audio, multi-processor might, and Blu-ray to deliver pure gaming perfection.

Online
Surf the net, message friends, and download movies, music and expansion packs, plus demos and games from the PlayStation Store.

Connectivity
USB slots to plug in DualShock pads and many other devices.

Want More?
Get inside access to hot games, sizzling betas, and other goodies by subscribing to Qore. Well? What are you waiting for?
Get it now on PSN
qore



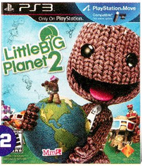
11

Role-Playing Shooter

Mass Effect 2

Mass Effect 2 features a spectacular story wrought with intense action and game-changing decisions, and the PS3 version of BioWare's third-person shooter/RPG is the franchise's best. Bring on *Mass Effect 3*!

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**



12

Platformer

LittleBigPlanet 2

Oh Sackboy, how we love thee. The biggest little game on PS3 is rocking our worlds with its sequel. The standard in-game fare is excellent, but it's the ingenious levels crafted by the the fan community that truly amaze and delight.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Media Molecule**

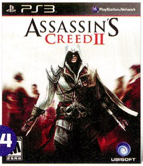
13

Role-Playing

Final Fantasy XIII

It takes a bit of a commitment and the gameplay is more linear in this outing, but the gorgeous visuals, crazy deep combat, and oh yes, the lovely heroine Lightning, make this RPG more than worth getting into, and through.

10 Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Square Enix**



14

Stealth Adventure

Assassin's Creed II

While the first *Assassin's Creed* may not quite have lived up to its full potential, Ubisoft built off what they learned to create the best parkour-influenced stealth game of all time. It doesn't hurt that it's awfully pretty in action either.

10 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

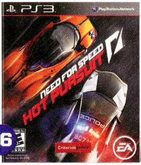
15

First-Person Puzzler

Portal 2

Valve's insidiously creative puzzle adventure twists our perception of reality and tosses it through gateways we shoot into its walls. If your brain starts hurting, invite a friend—co-op adds a "hole" other dimension to gameplay.

9 Pub **Valve / EA**
Dev **Valve**



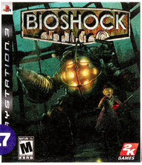
16

Driving

Need for Speed Hot Pursuit

The high-speed pursuits from the good old days are back and they look better than ever. Race the cops or join them, but the cars are hot either way so don't let that sway which side of the law to select.

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Criterion Games**



17

First-Person Shooter

BioShock

One of the most beautifully designed shooters of all time with an amazing story to boot. Due to the freshness and originality of the first romp through Rapture, we recommend the original over the still magnificent sequel.

10 Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Irrational Games**

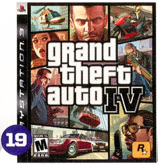
18

Sport

NBA 2K12

Basketball has always trailed behind other sports in its videogame translation. Not anymore. 2K Sports' franchise has reached true baller status with its gorgeous, feature-rich hoops experience—even down to the players' tattoos.

10 Pub **2K Sports**
Dev **Visual Concepts**



19

Open-World Action

Grand Theft Auto IV

There's a reason why *GTA* sells like crazy. This open-world gangster game is one of the most incredible achievements that the videogame medium has to offer. Great story, great characters, great adventure. Just plain great.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar North**

NEW

20

Role-Playing Game

The Elder Scrolls V Skyrim

The vast world presented in *Skyrim* offers hundreds of hours of immersive exploration and adventure. It's an intelligent RPG with gorgeous, intense action. Plus, dragons.

10 Pub **Bethesda**
Dev **Bethesda**

PSN Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES

1

Creepy Crawly Platformer

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. The game melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often but never feel frustrated about it.

10 Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**

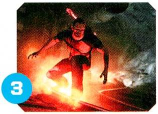
2

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's humor.

9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**


3

Frightening Lightning

inFamous Festival of Blood

This standalone spinoff sees *inFamous* hero Cole MacGrath facing off against vampires. At stake? (groan) Cole's very own soul. It's enough to make vampires fashionably cool again—in spite of *Twilight*.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Sucker Punch**

4

Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**

5

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

6

Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

Featuring alien and rock blasting galore, ihe fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair that taxes both our mind and our reflexes.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

7

Lettuce Defend Ourselves

Plants vs. Zombies

This ubiquitous tower defense game has made the platform rounds, but there's no denying its insidious charms and eternal goofiness. Hours will be spent meticulously maintaining the grid-like lawn in an attempt to fend off the rampaging waves of groaning, brain-chomping zombies.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **PopCap Games**

8

Role-playing Puzzler

Might & Magic Clash of Heroes

Don't overlook *Heroes* with its throwback 2D visuals and turn-based battle system—the RPG-flavored puzzle action requires stacking creatures for attacks and building walls for defense. It may look and play old school, but it's still mighty fun and magically challenging.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Capybara Games**

9

Hardcore brawler

Street Fighter III Third Strike Online

This perfect port of the legendary 1997 arcade game features all new netcode that virtually eliminates lag. *Third Strike*'s deep, demanding mechanics have earned it a diehard following. It deserves to be rediscovered and celebrated.

9 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom/Iron Galaxy**

10

Dolled-Up Adventure

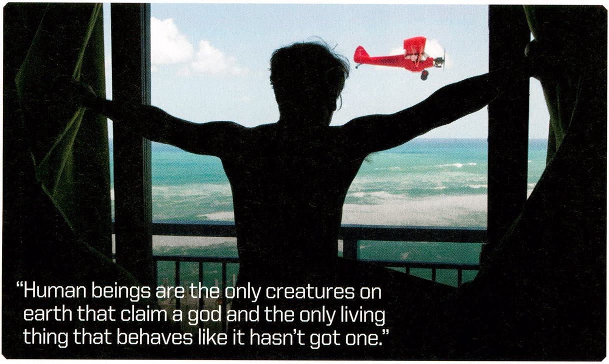
Stacking

Double Fine games come chock full of personality and charm. Using babushka dolls to solve puzzles and explore a '30s Depression-era-esque world of miniature mannequins may not seem all that compelling, but it is. This is a fine argument for Double Fine to make more PSN titles.

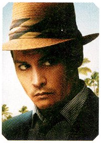
8 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month



"Human beings are the only creatures on earth that claim a god and the only living thing that behaves like it hasn't got one."



The Rum Diary

ETA **Feb 14** Rated **R** Genre **Comedy/Drama** Studio **Sony Pictures Home Entertainment**

Sometimes we like movies with more heart than action. Even if that heart belongs to Paul Kemp (played by Johnny Depp), an alcoholic American journalist who has moved to Puerto Rico to work for a newspaper there. Set in the 1950s, *The Rum Diary* (based on the novel by Hunter S. Thompson) portrays Kemp's life as he struggles to find purpose during a spiral of self-destruction. It's a tale rife with debauchery, self-searching, and, of course, rum.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

- *The Hangover Part II*
- *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*
- *Cowboys & Aliens*
- *Warrior*
- *Friends with Benefits*

TV Shows

- *Sons of Anarchy: Season 4*
- *The Walking Dead: Season 2*
- *Breaking Bad: Season 4*
- *American Horror Story: Season 1*
- *Dragon Ball Z: Season 6*

BEST FREE STUFF

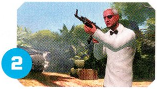
1

Armed and Dangerous

Battlefield 3 Physical Warfare pack

This pack grants instant access to the 88 LMG, the SKS sniper rifle flash suppressor, and the DAO-12 shotgun armed with flechette ammo.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **DICE**



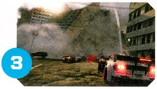
2

Character Flawed

GoldenEye 007: Reloaded Emilio Largo

Black eye patches are awesome. Unlock the renowned *Thunderball* thug and show 'em who's boss with this freebie DLC character.

Pub **Activision**
Dev **Eurocom**



3

New Model Year

MotorStorm Apocalypse Holiday/New Year's livery pack

What better way to usher in the New Year than shredding the track while sporting fashionable new styles.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Evolution Studios**

Brian Adam McCune

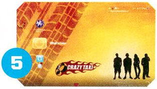
4

Yule Be Rockin'

Rocksmith Holiday 2011 song pack

Get an early start on prepping for next year's festivities by learning this song pack's shredtastic renditions of three classic holiday tunes. Instead of roasting chestnuts, why not melt faces by the open fire?

Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft**



5

Cabbing Fever

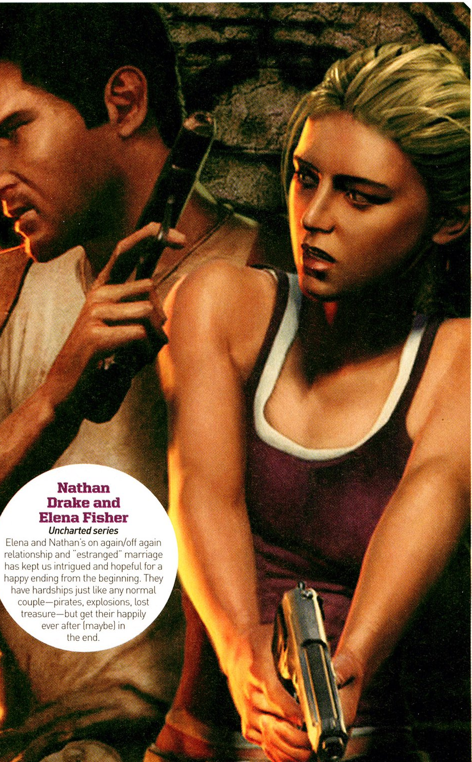
Crazy Taxi Static theme

We've always wondered what it would be like to drive a taxi for a living, but running over pedestrians and ignoring traffic laws isn't our thing. Well, it is actually, but we'll stick with this theme.

Pub **Sega**
Dev **Sega**

Couples

PlayStation's greatest couples get romantic... Sort of.



Meryl Silverburgh and Johnny Sasaki

Metal Gear Solid 4

One of PlayStation's most unlikely couples, Meryl and Johnny declared their love for one another during a grueling firefight on Liquid's massive warship, Outer Haven. Despite Johnny's tactical ineptitude and unpredictable bouts of diarrhea, Meryl agreed to accept his hand (and diarrhea) in marriage.

Commander Shepard and Everyone

Mass Effect series

The pimpin' Shepard always gets his (or her) paramour. We've romanced Miranda, Tali, Jack, Garrus, Jacob—heck, we've even charmed our way into bed with the tragically doomed Thane. But it's Shepard's "loyally in love" side that has us swooning for the Shepard/everyone pairing.

Nathan Drake and Elena Fisher

Uncharted series

Elena and Nathan's on again/off again relationship and "estranged" marriage has kept us intrigued and hopeful for a happy ending from the beginning. They have hardships just like any normal couple—pirates, explosions, lost treasure—but get their happily ever after (maybe) in the end.

Ico and Yorda

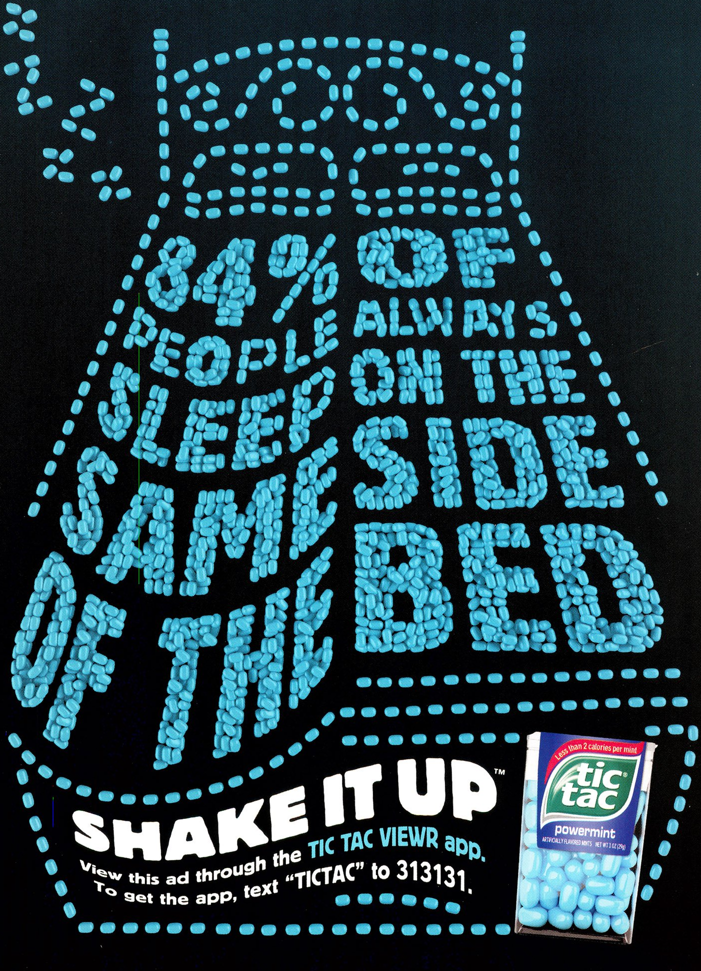
Ico

Be a hero and save the princess. It's an old tale, but never before have we seen a more endearing version than the princess/savior relationship between Ico and Yorda. No we're not being sickos, the rapport between the two reminds us of the strongest *sibling* bond and has us in an eternal state of "Bawww."

Zack Fair and Aerith Gainsborough

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

Years before Aerith swooned over a spikey blond-haired dude with a huge sword, she went bonkers for...a spikey black-haired dude with a huge sword. Zack was her original Cloud Strife. Maybe he'd still be alive if he spent more time training and less time building flower carts.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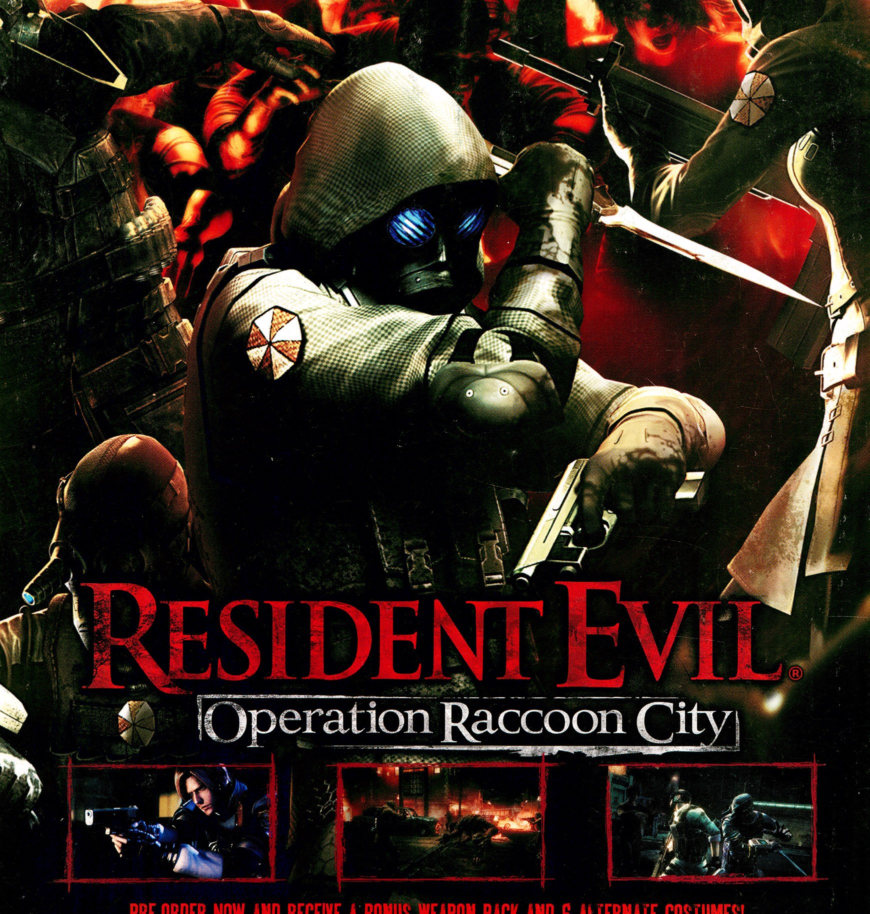

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